FACULTEIT ECONOMIE EN
BEDRIJFSWETENSCHAPPEN

KU LEUVEN

Does flexibility work for the workless?

Examining the impact of a flexible job search among unemployed jobseekers.

Proefschrift voorgedragen
tot het behalen van de graad
van Doctor in de Toegepaste
Economische Wetenschappen

door

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Een kleine enquête onder vrienden en familie leert me dat ik veel dingen ben: doorzetter, harde werker, zorgzaam, begripvol, luisterend oor, sportliefhebber, maar ook perfectionistisch en nonchalant (die combinatie bestaat blijkbaar), soms wat ongeduldig en veeleisend. Eén woord komt echter nooit voor in de lijstjes: avonturier. In wezen ben ik dit dan ook niet. Ik waag me niet aan springen uit een vliegtuig, bengelen aan een elastieken koord, varen op een wilde rivier. Noch komt het spontaan bij mij op om een kanaal over te zwemmen, de geluidsmuur te doorbreken, oorlogsgebied te bezoeken, te skiën buiten de piste. Toch heb ik de afgelopen 4,5 jaar als één groot avontuur ervaren. Ook al zat ik tijdens mijn doctoraat hoofdzakelijk gekluisterd aan een bureaustoel te werken op mijn computer en bracht ik mijn dagen dus door in een 100% veilige omgeving – de enige potentiële arbeidsongevallen die ik kan bedenken zijn mezelf snijden aan papier en het slaan van een nietje in mijn eigen hand –, toch heb ik me tijdens die periode gevoeld als iemand die zich gestort heeft in een avontuur waarvan op voorhand niet geweten was waar het zou eindigen, laat staan hoe de weg naar het ongekende einde er uit zou zien.

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Een landkaart behoort tot de basisuitrusting van elke avonturier en is dan ook essentieel. Het is de bron van alle informatie en ondersteuning bij het bewandelen van je route: het is handig om hindernissen te helpen overwinnen, geeft je bevestiging dat je de juiste weg aan het opgaan bent of helpt je net in de juiste richting als je niet meer weet van welk hout pijlen maken. Bovendien kan je een landkaart zo vaak gebruiken en bovenhalen als je nodig acht. Marijke, elk van deze taken heb jij voor mij uitstekend vervuld, waarvoor ik je erg dankbaar ben. Je bent daarbovenop nog een erg ‘nieuwe’ landkaart gezien ik je eerste doctoraatstudente ben – ik moest je bij wijze van spreken nog uit het plastiekje halen – wat eveneens betekent dat je nog vele malen dienst zou kunnen doen voor andere avonturen van mezelf of andere doctoraatstudenten. Ik kan dit alleen maar toejuichen. Ik moet ook toegeven dat ik gehecht geraakt ben aan mijn landkaart in de afgelopen jaren. Anders gezegd, ik apprecieer erg de manier waarop we met elkaar omgegaan zijn tijdens mijn doctoraatstraject en ik heb er veel van bijgeleerd. De commentaren op mijn teksten waren grondig en veeleisend, maar zo heb je mij en mijn onderzoek een niveau hoger getild (getuige ook de uiteenlopende prijzen die we reeds met de verschillende papers gewonnen hebben). Maar naast het doctoraatswerk was er ook ruimte om

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Daarnaast is ook een kompas een basisitem van elke avonturier. Een kompas wordt net iets minder vaak bovengehaald in vergelijking met een landkaart, maar is even onmisbaar. Op cruciale momenten helpt een kompas je om je positie te bepalen en keuzes te maken over de richting die je best uitgaat. Luc, jij bent mijn kompas geweest de voorbije jaren. Jij gaf me veel vrijheid en autonomie, maar tegelijkertijd kon ik op je rekenen om me te helpen knopen door te hakken of alles terug in perspectief te zien. Bovendien liet je toe dat ik de combinatie maakte tussen beleidsgericht onderzoek voor het Steunpunt WSE en meer internationaal gericht onderzoek voor de onderzoeksgroep personeel en organisatie. Ik heb in die 4,5 jaar tijd talrijke nevenprojecten mogen doen over uiteenlopende thema's: de uittredeleeftijd en gemiddelde loopbaanduur van 50-plussers, het loopbaanpanel, het optimal matching project om loopbaanpatronen in kaart te brengen, het RVA project rond de impact van een heroriëntatie, het ACV project over interne loopbaantransities, de decompositie-analyses op de doorstroomkansen naar werk van werkloze 50-plussers, het PIAAC project rond de lessen voor het Vlaamse arbeidsmarktbeleid uit de Adult Skill Survey, enzoverder. Dit extra werk zorgde vaak voor een overvolle agenda (maar daar hoef ik je niks over te leren ☺) en voor het bij wijlen wat verwaarlozen van mijn doctoraat, maar het zorgde ook voor afwisseling en net het volhouden van mijn doctoraat. Bovendien maakt het van mij ook een meer veelzijdige onderzoeker met een sterke focus op beleidsrelevante onderzoeksvragen. Ik heb op dat vlak véél geleerd van jou, waarvoor mijn oprechte dank. Ik heb daarnaast ook het gevoel dat we de voorbije jaren in een uitstekende verstandhouding hebben samengewerkt, steeds beter op elkaar ingespeeld, wat me alleen maar hoopvol stemt naar de toekomst toe.

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Zowat elk avontuur gaat op geregelde tijdstippen gepaard met beproevingen, zij het in de vorm van weggeblazen tentjes, overstromingen, ontberingen, heimwee, losgelopen wild, etc. Ook ik ben hier – figuurlijk! – geconfronteerd mee geweest. Zo heb ik tijdens de longitudinale dataverzameling ettelijke honderden telefoontjes en reacties gekregen van werkzoekenden. Helemaal niks mis mee, ware het niet dat sommigen er rotsvast van overtuigd waren dat ik hen met onmiddellijke ingang een nieuwe job ging bezorgen, anderen wilden even hun mening kwijt over de nuttel oosheid van wetenschappelijk onderzoek en mijn doctoraat (genre "Zoek uw geluk en doctoraat op een andere manier, niet met mijn miserie.") en nog anderen vonden het uiten van fysieke bedreigingen op hun plaats, waardoor ik een periode lang met een gesloten deur en een klein hartje tot in de late uren op kantoor verbleef. Jobstudenten kwamen niet opdagen, zodat ik meermaals tot in de vroege uurtjes duizenden brieven en enquêtes tegen snel-tempo in enveloppes leerde steken. Tot twee maal toe ben ik de weken voor mijn doctorale seminaries geveld geweest door griep – ondanks vaccinatie –, wat leidde tot één uitgesteld seminarie en één seminarie gevend vanop een stoel en met pauze (waarvoor dank Marijke ☺). Daarnaast waren er de geregelde openbare vervoerproblemen, internet- en computerpannes (wat uiteindelijk leidde tot het volledig formatteren van mijn harde schijf), kapotte verwarmingen,… maar er waren ook de slapeloze nachten met getwijfel of doctoreren wel een juiste keuze is en of ik de verschillende projecten die tegelijkertijd liepen wel tot een goed einde kon brengen (zonder ook mijn privéleven niet al te veel schade te berokkenen). Ik zou dit alles niet overwonnen hebben, ware het niet dat ik enkele fantastische compagnons de route had in de vorm van collega's, vrienden en familie.

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Sarah Vansteenkiste

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Flexibility among unemployed jobseekers

Flexibility among unemployed jobseekers, i.e. the extent to which jobseekers are looking for or willing to accept jobs that deviate from their studies and earlier working experience, is seen as an important attitude and behavior on today's labor market by policymakers. This is due to some drastic changes the labor market has undergone. Since 2008, the western world is confronted with an economic recession, which has inflated unemployment rates in several countries. In 2012, around 25 million persons were unemployed in Europe, good for 10.5% of the working population (Eurostat, 2013). Even though this has resulted in more unemployed persons per vacancy and thus an easing of labor market tightness, most European employers still report considerable difficulties to recruit personnel (European Commission, 2012). In this labor market context, policymakers believe that flexibility may help resolve these recruitment difficulties and assume that employers will be eager to hire flexible unemployed jobseekers. As a result, in this point of view, by being flexible, unemployed jobseekers should find reemployment more easily.

Next, also career scholars believe that flexibility can be helpful for jobseekers and have raised the importance attached to this concept in recent years. Under the banner of globalisation, technological revolutions and exacting customer needs, organisational structure and life has been subjected to transformation (e.g. Lawler, 1994). As a result, the development of employees' careers has altered. Instead of traditional, steady career paths guided by the employer, employees

are now presumed to hold self-directed boundaryless careers, i.e. careers of which the onus rests on the employee himself and where physical boundaries are blurred and can easily be crossed (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2004). In the notions of these boundaryless and self-directed careers, being able to adjust swiftly to different work and career circumstances is deemed indispensable (e.g. Hall, 2004; Koen et al., 2010; Mervish & Hall, 1994). As Fugate et al. (2004; p. 15) put it: "Survival in this turbulent career environment requires workers to continually manage change – in themselves and their contexts. Thus, a person's ability and willingness to adapt is essential to career success." In this new career context, flexibility is considered to be both necessary and rewarding. It may help employed persons to keep their attractiveness towards employers (Chan, 2000), and unemployed persons to increase their chances of being recruited, since companies are working in a turbulent environment and are in need of flexibility to address this context (Van den Broeck et al., 2010).

However, some counter indications suggest that flexibility may not be as positive as expected by most policymakers and career scholars, casting doubts on whether or not to promote flexibility among unemployed jobseekers. HR-oriented research on recruitment for instance seems to advocate that flexibility may also negatively impact unemployed jobseekers' search success. As organizations base their hiring decisions on the perceived match between the job requirements and applicant's characteristics like education and aspirations (Kulik et al., 2007), a broad job search – thus a high level of flexibility on the part of the individual – may reduce the perceived match as judged by the organization, in that way reducing the likelihood of a job offer. Certain scholars are also concerned that flexibility may increase the likelihood of arriving in an inferior job, which may lead to lower reemployment quality, e.g. Van den Broeck et al. (2010), though not investigated.

Still, at present, there is little understanding of the extent to which flexibility actually improves or limits the chances of (re)integration in the labor market and whether it influences the quality of reemployment. Hence, before relying on the introduction of further flexibility as a policy measure or necessary career skill, its impact on the likelihood and quality of reemployment should be investigated.

Studying flexibility as both an attitude and behavior

Flexibility can be interpreted as an unemployed jobseeker's attitude or mindset or as his actual searching behavior. In career literature, flexibility as an attitude or mindset is key. In this respect, career scholars often coin the term 'psychological mobility', which denotes people's attitudes towards crossing career boundaries (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009). It also has been defined as people's perceived capacity to envision a variety of career options (Forret, Sullivan & Mainiero, 2010; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010). For unemployed individuals, it implies that people should be willing or prepared to accept jobs that e.g., deviate from the previous job(s) and/or that are not in line with one's educational background (Peiró et al., 2002; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Even though psychological mobility is a key concept in the new vision on careers, at present there is little research that proposes a concrete measurement or empirically examines its impact in an unemployment context. Hence, its actual value for the job search process remains to be investigated (Forret et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010).

Policymakers are more interested in flexibility as an actual behavior, since this is more visible and can therefore be more closely monitored. A certain attitude may lead to different types of behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Thurstone, 1931), so that an attitude may have a different outcome than a behavior. For this reason, it is interesting to not only look at attitudes

but to study also actual behavior. In the job search literature, several job search behaviors have received a lot of attention, such as job search intensity (the frequency with which job seekers, during a set period of time, engage in specific job search activities, like visiting job websites, discussing job leads with friends and sending out resumés to prospective employers; Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2006) and job search strategies (whether jobseekers focus on specific types of jobs during their search or rather examine a variety of jobs; Stevens & Beach, 1996; Koen et al. 2010). However, the theme of flexible job search behaviour has been largely disregarded in the job search literature hitherto. Consequently, there are no validated scales to measure the extent jobseekers are or behave flexibly, nor empirical studies of the impact of flexibility.

Aim and structure of this dissertation

In this dissertation, we aim to address the above mentioned research gaps by elaborating concrete measures of both psychological mobility and flexible job search behavior and investigating their impact on job search success of unemployed jobseekers. To this end, we elaborate three empirical studies using two different datasets of Belgian unemployed jobseekers. The first study investigates the impact of psychological mobility on the number of job offers an unemployed jobseeker receives. The second and third study focus on the impact of flexible job search behavior. In the second study, we develop a multidimensional measure of flexible job search behavior and test its relationship with important job search antecedents and job search success outcomes, such as the number of job offers and reemployment. In the third study, we continue with the different types of flexible job search behavior as suggested in study two and explore their impact on reemployment quality. Each of these three studies helps us to create an accurate picture of the total effects flexibility brings about. Before presenting the three empirical studies, however, we provide a policy-oriented article in which we discuss the flexibility

demands policymakers have in Belgium, and how they compare to 24 other European OECD countries. As such, we want to inform about the institutional setting regarding flexibility, which is useful as background for the three empirical studies.

In sum, this dissertation aims at expanding the general knowledge of the impact of flexibility among unemployed jobseekers. As such, the insights that this study yields may enable the impact and prerequisites of a re-orientation policy to be assessed more accurately, and recommendations to be formulated on measures that could support such a policy. This information is especially relevant for the numerous actors involved in labor market policy, such as career coaches, employment service personnel, outplacement offices, educational institutions (with respect to school-leavers), those who train jobseekers, and so on (Saks, 2005). An important added value of this dissertation is that we try to form this accurate view of the total effects flexibility brings about, not only by focusing on its impact on reemployment likelihood, but also on reemployment quality. It is increasingly recognized that job search success does not simply imply finding a job, but rather finding a *good* job which has the prospect of long-lasting employment (Koen et al., 2010; McKee-Ryan et al., 2009). More and more research investigates the impact of job search behavior on reemployment quality. By studying the impact of flexibility on both the likelihood ánd quality of reemployment, we operate conform the insights of scholars which states that not only the fact that people find a job matters, but also the kind of job they perform. Furthermore, up to now, job search research has mostly introduced theoretical thinking of scholars in its studies and investigated whether this theoretical reasoning is correct or not. In this dissertation however, we confront a policy vision with scientific research. In the end, unemployed jobseekers are expected to behave conform policy rules, making these rules crucial in their day-to-day life and decisions. By this dissertation we try to bring policy and academic

thinking closer together and as such hope to enhance the life and decision making process of unemployed jobseekers.

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CHAPTER 1.

FLEXIBILITY IN A POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

In the first chapter of this dissertation we discuss the job search flexibility that is demanded from unemployed individuals in policy legislation in Belgium and how this compares to other OECD countries. OECD countries – and thus also Belgium – have legislation on three types of flexibility demands: occupational, geographical and wage flexibility demands (Hasselpflug, 2005; Grubb, 2001; Venn, 2012). Firstly, the demands on *occupational* flexibility imply that an unemployed individual must to some degree accept job offers in other occupational areas than that of his previous job(s) or studies. Secondly, *geographical* flexibility implies that an unemployed individual must to some extent accept job offers which demand a certain predetermined transportation time. Lastly, the *wage* flexibility demands entail that an unemployed individual must to some extent accept job offers which offer a lower wage than that of the previous job(s) or than that of the usual wage for that occupation. Although all OECD countries have some legislation on these flexibility demands, their interpretation of these demands differ and can be more or less stringent. In this chapter, we start with an overview of the Belgian legislation towards the flexibility demands and its enforcement. Next, we position the Belgian enforcement to that of other European OECD countries. To this end, we perform a cluster analysis on 25 European OECD countries (including Belgium) as to group these countries in regimes with similar approaches to the flexibility demands and corresponding sanctions. As

such, we gain more insight into the relative position of Belgium regarding the strictness of the flexibility demands. This is helpful as background information for the interpretation of the results of the three empirical studies.

Flexibility demands and sanctions in a Belgian context

In order to be entitled to unemployment benefits, the Belgian Law requires unemployed individuals to be searching for and responding to every 'suitable' job offer. The criteria that determine what is a suitable job offer are captured in three specific domains, namely demands on unemployed individuals' occupational, geographical and wage job search. Hereafter, we discuss the Belgian criteria for each of these demands.

Occupational flexibility demands

Until 2012, during the first six months of unemployment, jobseekers could restrict their job search to jobs which correspond to one's previous profession or one's normal profession given the educational background. After this six-months period, every occupation is in principal regarded as suitable. The protection period of six months could be shortened by the public employment agency if there are poor employment prospects in one's professional domain. After 2012, this legislation was tightened, in that the overall protection period was shortened to five months and to three months or less for unemployed younger than 30 or with less than five years of working experience.

Geographical flexibility demands

In general, the unemployed cannot refuse jobs within a daily commuting distance of 4 hours or a daily absence from work of 12 hours. Until 2012, job offers could not be declined if the work-home distance was less than 25 km, regardless of the transportation time. Since 2012 however, this work-home distance is increased to 60 km a day.

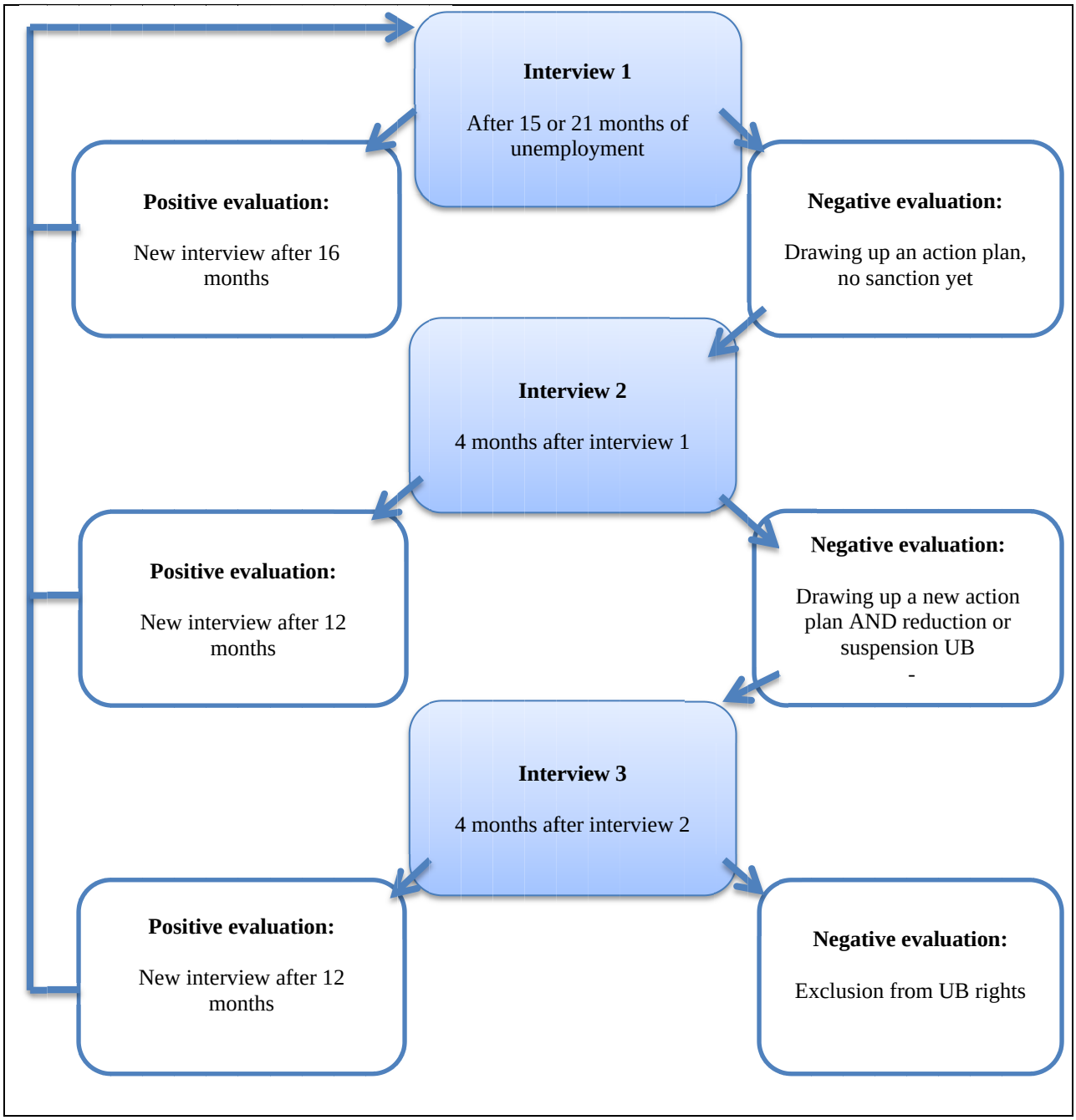
Wage flexibility demands

Belgian unemployed individuals can constrain their job search to jobs which pay at least their unemployment benefit. Thus, the net earnings in the new job, minus the travel expenses, should not be smaller than the unemployment benefits, otherwise the unemployed is allowed to refuse the job offer. Costs of childcare are not taken into account and can therefore not be deducted from the net earnings in the new job.

Sanctions

The job search efforts performed by unemployed individuals are assessed and evaluated during an interview with the National Employment Office (RVA or 'Rijksdienst voor arbeidsvoorziening'). This interview takes place after 15 months of unemployment (for those aged under 25) or after 21 months (for those aged over 25). The evaluation of job search efforts takes into account the personal situation of the unemployed as well as the state of the labor market. If the efforts are deemed sufficient, a new interview takes place after 16 months. If the efforts are regarded as inadequate, an action plan will be suggested and evaluated in a new interview four months later. If the unemployed has not complied with the action plan, he gets a temporary and limited sanction (for up to 4 months), which consists of either a reduction in the amount of unemployment benefit or a suspension of the payment of benefits altogether. Moreover, the unemployed person is required to engage in a renewed and more intensified action plan for a new period of 4 months. During a third interview, the unemployed' compliance of this renewed action plan is evaluated. If the unemployed has complied with the action plan, he regains full payment of his unemployment benefits and is invited to a new interview after only 12 months; however, if the person did not fulfill the action plan, he is excluded from his right of unemployment benefits. A schematic overview of these different steps is provided in figure 1.

Figure 1. **Schematic overview of the sanctioning system of Belgium**



Flexibility demands and sanctions in a European context

In the previous section, we discussed the flexibility demands and sanctioning system of Belgium. Other European OECD countries also have legislation on these aspects (Hasselpflug,

2005; Grubb, 2001; Venn, 2012). In this section, we group these countries into different clusters, depending on the strictness or leniency of their policy towards the three different flexibility demands and their sanctioning system. Hasselpflug (2005) and Venn (2012) distinguished 5 categories of possible policies that occur in OECD countries with respect to the occupational and geographical flexibility demands and sanctions. We apply a similar methodology to come to 5 categories of wage flexibility demand policies. In table 1, we summarize each of these five different categories with respect to the flexibility forms and sanctions, with "1" referring to a more tolerant policy towards the unemployed and "5" a more stringent policy.

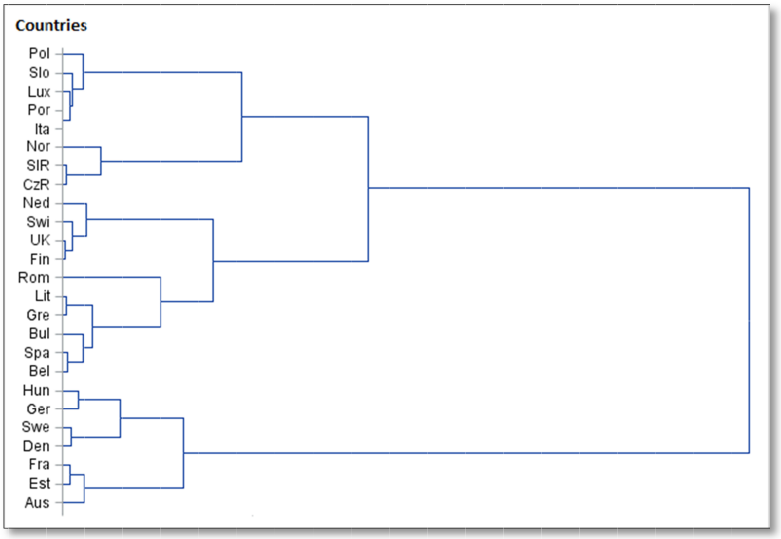
Table 1. Categorization of the types of policies on the flexibility demands and sanctions based on Venn (2012)

Occupational Mobility	1	The unemployed can refuse job offers in other occupational areas indefinitely
	2	The unemployed can refuse job offers in other occupational areas for a limited period of 6 months or more
	3	The unemployed can refuse job offers in other occupational areas for a period of less than 6 months
	4	No explicit reservations but the unemployed person's qualifications and the length of the unemployment spell are taken into account
	5	The unemployed must accept all job offers that he/she is capable of doing
Geographical Mobility	1	No demands on geographical mobility
	2	The unemployed must accept a daily transportation time of up to 2 hours per day
	3	The unemployed must accept a daily transportation time of up to 4 hours per day
	4	The unemployed must accept a daily transportation time of 4+ hours per day
	5	The unemployed must be willing to move
Wage Mobility	1	The unemployed can refuse jobs with other wages indefinitely
	2	The unemployed can refuse jobs that pay differently for a limited period of 6 months or more
	3	The unemployed can refuse jobs that pay differently for a limited period of less than 6 months
	4	The unemployed can refuse jobs if the pay is not higher than the unemployment benefit or minimum wage (no time instructions)
	5	The unemployed must accept all job offers regardless of the pay
Sanctions for refusing job offers	1	0-4 weeks (including benefit reductions)
	2	5-9 weeks
	3	10-14 weeks
	4	More than 14 weeks
	5	Suspension of unemployment benefits

Based on the categorization of table 1, the policy of each European OECD country on the job search behavior of unemployed individuals can be screened. As such, every country can be

given a value of 1 to 5 on their respective flexibility demands and sanctioning system according to the strictness of their policy. Venn (2012) provided a summary of the different flexibility policies OECD countries have. Based on this summary, we give each country a score of 1 to 5 on its respective flexibility policy. In a next step, we use hierarchical and non-hierarchical cluster analysis to group the 25 European OECD countries that have similar characteristics across the flexibility demands and sanctions. The hierarchical analysis measures the distance between each pair of countries and accordingly divides the countries into specific subgroups. Based on the Root Mean Square Standard Deviation (RMSSTD) values, an optimal cluster solution is obtained. A large leap in the values of the RMSSTD suggests that very different observations are put together and that it is therefore no longer meaningful to take these observations together in one cluster. When we look at the RMSSTD values for the six and five clusters solution, there is a relatively large leap in values: from 0.64 (6 clusters) to 0.71 (5 clusters). Therefore, we can presume that reducing the six-clusters solution further, will imply putting together observations with large differences. Therefore, the six clusters solution seems optimal and we will continue with this number of clusters. The dendogram of this cluster analysis can be found in figure 2.

Figure 2. Dendogram hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward's method)

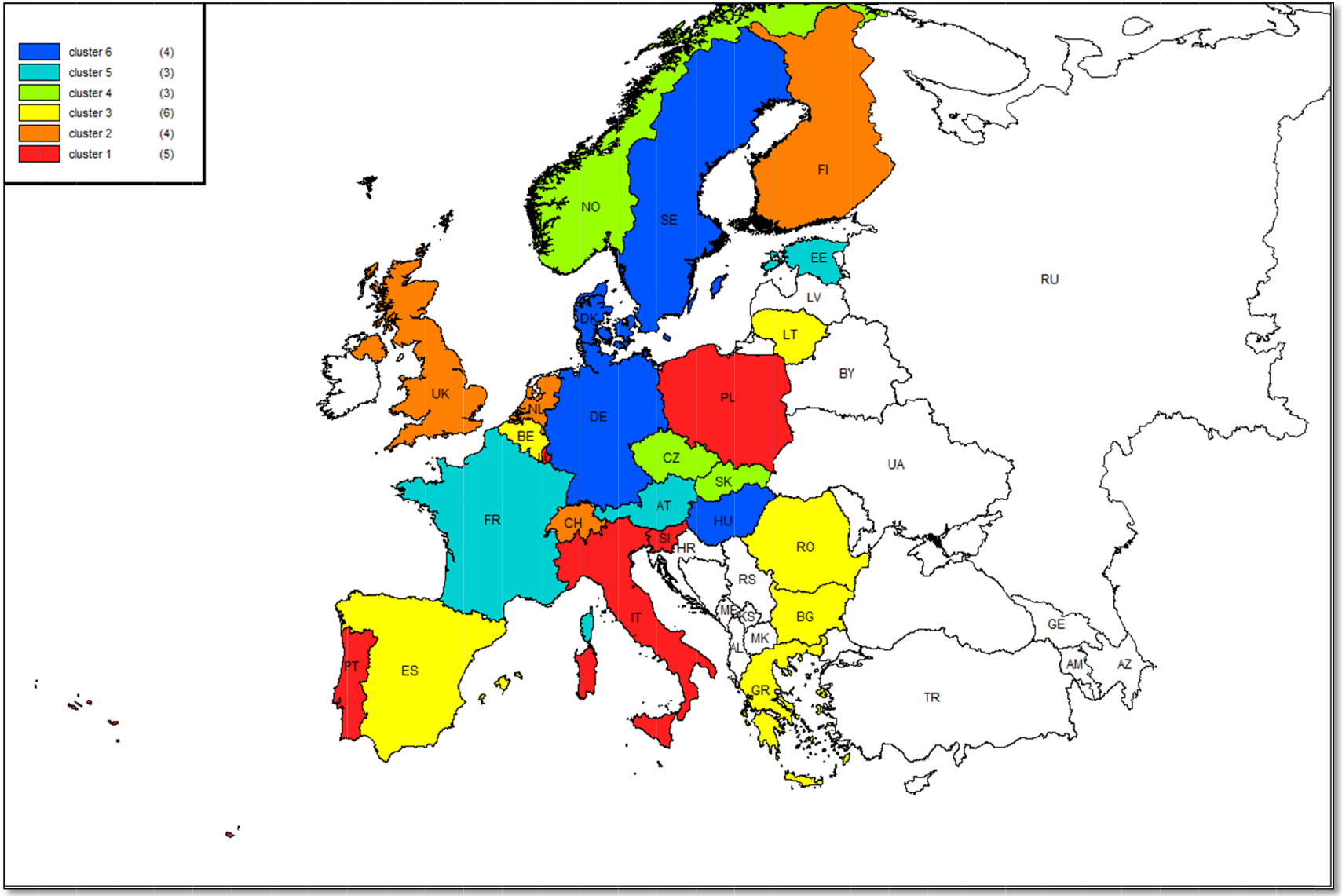


Next, a non-hierarchical cluster analysis is performed on the six-clusters solution. This will assign each country to a cluster on the basis of the distance between the country and the mean value of the cluster. In table 2 each of the 25 European countries is assigned to one of the 6 clusters and gives the corresponding country scores on the flexibility demands and sanctions. Figure 3 gives a visual overview of the cluster solution on a European map.

Table 2. Scores of the different countries on the flexibility demands and sanctions

		Occupational Mobility	Geographical Mobility	Wage Mobility	Sanctions
cluster 1	Italy (IT)	4	3	5	5
	Luxembourg (LU)	4	3	4	5
	Poland (PL)	5	3	5	4
	Portugal (PT)	4	3	5	5
	Slovakia (SI)	3	3	5	5
	Mean	4	3	4,8	4,8
cluster 2	Finland (FI)	3	3.0	5	2.0
	Netherlands (NL)	2	2.5	5	1.0
	Switzerland (CH)	4	3.0	5	2.5
	United Kingdom (UK)	3	2.5	5	2.0
	Mean	3	2,8	5	1,9
cluster 3	Belgium (BE)	2	3	4	3
	Bulgaria (BG)	2	2	5	4
	Greece (GR)	1	3	5	5
	Lithuania (LT)	1	3	5	4
	Romania (RO)	1	5	5	5
	Spain (ES)	2	3	5	3
	Mean	1,5	3,2	4,8	4
cluster 4	Czech Republic (CZ)	4	5	5	4
	Norway (NO)	5	5	5	2
	Slovenia (SK)	4	5	5	5
	Mean	4,3	5	5	3,7
cluster 5	Austria (AT)	3	2.0	1.5	2
	Estonia (EE)	3	2.0	3.5	1
	France (FR)	3	1.5	2.5	1
	Mean	3	1,8	2,5	1,3
cluster 6	Denmark (DK)	5	3.5	1.0	1
	Germany (DE)	5	3.0	2.5	1
	Hungary (HU)	5	3.0	4.0	2
	Sweden (SE)	4	3.0	1.0	1
	Mean	4,8	3,1	2,1	1,3

Figure 3. Solution of the cluster analysis on a European map



Cluster 1 consists of Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia. It is characterized by a strict policy on wage and occupational flexibility demands. Most policymakers in this cluster impose that unemployed individuals accept all job offers that he/she is capable of doing and accept jobs that pay at least the minimum wage or unemployment benefit. Furthermore, countries in this cluster have a moderate policy with respect to the geographical flexibility and require a transportation time of up to four hours per day. The flexibility demands are accompanied by severe sanctions, namely a full suspension of unemployment benefits in case of refusing job offers. As such, the countries included in this cluster enforce the most stringent sanctions.

Cluster 2 is composed of Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The wage flexibility demands are strictly interpreted, with unemployed jobseekers being required to accept all job offers regardless of pay. With respect to job content and commuting time, requirements are moderate. Most countries allow unemployed jobseekers to refuse jobs in other occupational areas for a limited period of less than 6 months and demand a commuting time of up to 4 hours a day. As opposed to the previous cluster, the sanctions for refusing job offers that are in line with the flexibility demands are relatively soft, with a suspension of benefits for at most 5 to 9 weeks.

Cluster 3 contains Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Romania and Spain. As was the case in both of the previous clusters, these countries have a strict policy on wage flexibility, with scores of 4 or 5 out of 5, meaning that unemployed jobseekers can only refuse jobs if the pay is not higher than the unemployment benefit/minimum wage (Belgium) or have to accept all job offers regardless of pay (Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Romania and Spain). Countries in this cluster are less strict in their geographical demands and even relatively lenient in their

occupational flexibility demands. Greece, Lithuania and Romania allow unemployed jobseekers to refuse jobs in other occupational areas indefinitely, whereas Belgium, Bulgaria and Spain allow this for a limited period of 6 months or more. The sanctions imposed in this group of countries vary from being mild (suspension of benefits of 10-14 weeks) to severe (indefinite suspension of benefits).

Cluster 4 encloses Czech Republic, Norway and Slovenia. These three countries are typified by a strict policy on all three flexibility demands: unemployed jobseekers must not only accept all job offers that he/she is capable of doing, regardless of the pay, but also be willing to move. The accompanying sanctions differ however in this group of countries, with Czech Republic and Slovenia having a suspension of benefits for more than 14 weeks or even indefinitely, while in Norway unemployed jobseekers only lose entitlement to benefits for 8 weeks.

Cluster 5 is made up of Austria, Estonia and France. The policies in these countries are the least severe. Unemployed jobseekers are on average allowed to refuse jobs that pay differently for a period of 6 months and more and that are in other occupational areas for a period of less than 6 months. The daily transportation time averages to up to 2 hours a day, as opposed to 4 hours and more in most other countries. Moreover, the unemployment benefit penalties applied in these countries are also among the least stringent and imply a suspension of at most 5 to 9 weeks.

Cluster 6 consists of the final 4 countries: Denmark, Germany, Hungary and Sweden. In contrast with cluster 1 to 4, the countries in this cluster let unemployed jobseekers refuse jobs with other wages indefinitely. On the other hand, the policy with respect to occupational flexibility is more severe with jobseekers having to accept all job offers that they are capable of

doing. The commuting time required in this cluster amounts to 4 hours a day and is thereby similar to the demands of cluster 1 to 3. As in the previous cluster, sanctions for refusing job offers are lenient and average a suspension of unemployed benefits of at most 5 to 9 weeks.

Conclusion

In this article, we discussed the flexibility demands and corresponding sanctions in a Belgian and European context. OECD countries have legislation on three types of flexibility demands to some extent, i.e., demands with respect to occupation, geography and wage. Results from the cluster analyses demonstrated that European countries can be grouped in six different clusters regarding their policies on these flexibility demands and sanctions. Belgium appeared to have a similar policy as Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Romania and Spain, which are all characterized by a strict policy on wage flexibility and a relatively more lenient approach towards geographical and occupational flexibility, together with mild to strict sanctions.

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CHAPTER 2.

BEING UNEMPLOYED IN THE BOUNDARYLESS CAREER ERA: DOES PSYCHOLOGICAL MOBILITY PAY OFF?[1]

Abstract

In the notions of the boundaryless and self-directed careers, being able to adjust swiftly to different work and career circumstances is deemed to be an imperative component of career success. Also for unemployed individuals psychological mobility, i.e. the extent to which people can envision a variety of career options as viable opportunities for them, is assumed to be a key attitude. In this study, we examine whether psychological mobility stimulates or constraints an unemployed jobseekers' search success. Hereto, we draw on data of 1840 Belgian unemployed individuals. As hypothesized, we find that psychologically mobile individuals spend more time searching for a job and are invited more often to a selection interview. However, on average they receive less job offers, since they also experience more constraints in their job search process. Overall, our study demonstrates that psychological mobility cannot straightforwardly be associated with positive career outcomes in every context or subpopulation and points to the necessity of taking structure and not only agency factors into account to fully grasp the outcomes of the boundaryless career.

Keywords: psychological mobility; job search; unemployment; boundaryless careers; job search success

[1] This article has been published as Vansteenkiste, S., Verbruggen, M. & Sels, L. (2013). Being Unemployed in the Boundaryless Career Era: Does Psychological Mobility Pay Off? *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 82, 135-143.*

Introduction

Due to the changed and more volatile nature of careers, people are more often confronted with (periods of) unemployment (Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003; Rousseau, 1997). Psychological mobility, i.e. the extent to which people can envision a variety of career options as viable opportunities for them (Forret, Sullivan & Mainiero, 2010), is assumed to be a key attitude for handling these periods (Forret et al., 2010; Koen et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Since psychologically mobile individuals see – and are thus likely to explore – more career options (Zikic & Klehe, 2006; Zikic & Saks, 2009), they are expected to be more fruitful in their job search.

Psychological mobility among the unemployed workforce is also associated with labor market benefits (Venn, 2012). In particular, stimulating unemployed jobseekers to be psychologically mobile is seen as a way to address the increased mismatch between labor demand and supply (Herremans et al., 2011). In recent years, countries across the world are confronted with both a rising number of job openings and a rising, or at least stable, unemployment rate (Barlevy, 2011; Kosfeld, Dreger & Eckey, 2008; Herremans et al., 2011), a situation resulting from a mismatch between, on the one hand, the characteristics and requirements of the available jobs and, on the other hand, jobseekers' preferences and skills (Kosfeld et al., 2008). Stimulating unemployed individuals to broaden their job search and take into account job opportunities that deviate from their initial preferences would increase the labor supply for a given labor demand and is therefore expected to improve the matching process.

Despite the importance attached to psychological mobility by both career scholars and policymakers, the recruitment literature suggests that psychological mobility may not necessarily enhance a jobseeker's search success. Since organizations generally look for applicants who fit

well with the organization and the vacant job (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005; Kulik, Roberson & Perry, 2007), psychologically mobile individuals may experience more difficulties in convincing employers of their match with the job. Indeed, a high openness to different career options may signal that the unemployed individual has no clear career focus, has little ambition and/or is little motivated for the specific job he or she is applying for, which could reduce the job seeker's persuasiveness and in that way his or her job search success.

To the best of our knowledge, no empirical study has examined the impact of psychological mobility during unemployment to date (Forret et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). With this study, we aim to address this gap. In particular, this study examines if psychological mobility during unemployment stimulates or rather constraints job search success. We test our hypotheses using a sample of 1840 Belgian unemployed. We define psychological mobility during unemployment as the unemployed individual's openness towards jobs that differ from his or her previous job (i.e. the job before becoming unemployed). This definition is in line with prevailing interpretations of psychological mobility among unemployed jobseekers given by policymakers (e.g. Venn, 2012) and scholars (e.g. Van den Broeck et al., 2010). This study provides insight into the question whether psychological mobility or people's willingness to cross boundaries – which is believed to be an important aspect of the boundaryless career (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) – can straightforwardly be associated with positive career outcomes. In that way, we do not only respond to calls to explore the impact of psychological mobility (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Verbruggen, 2012), but we also examine potential downsides of new careers (e.g. Briscoe, Hall & DeMuth, 2006; King, 2004).

Psychological Mobility

Psychological mobility concerns the subjective side of job mobility (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Verbruggen, 2012). The construct has been introduced by Sullivan and Arthur (2006) as a counterweight to the dominantly objective way of interpreting Arthur and Rousseau's (1996) construct of the "boundaryless career". Indeed, most research on the boundaryless career has focused on careers that cross physical boundaries (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), whereas the original conceptualization of Arthur and Rousseau was more general, encompassing both physical and psychological boundary crossing. By introducing the construct of psychological mobility, Sullivan and Arthur (2006) aimed to stimulate more research on the understudied subjective side of the boundaryless career.

Psychological mobility refers to people's attitudes towards crossing career boundaries (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009). It has been defined as people's perceived capacity to envision a variety of career options (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010). Just as there are different types of physical mobility depending on the type of boundary that is crossed, there are variations of psychological mobility depending on the kind of transition(s) the attitude relates to (Forret et al., 2010; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009). People may, for instance, feel differently about making promotion than they do about changing organizations or trying to escape unemployment. In addition, just as there are different physical aspects to the 'act of boundary crossing', there are different kinds of attitudes people can have towards transitions (Verbruggen, 2012). Psychological mobility has for instance been viewed as the perceived capacity to move (e.g. Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), as the receptivity or willingness to move (e.g. Lazarova & Taylor,

2009; Marler, Barringer & Milkovich, 2003) and as the way people interpret a specific career move (e.g. Forret et al., 2010).

The limited research on psychological mobility to date (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) has mainly examined the impact of a boundaryless mindset, a specific type of psychological mobility that refers to people's preference toward crossing organizational and departmental boundaries (Briscoe et al., 2006), with a sample of employed adults. For employed adults, psychological mobility was found to relate positively to job search behavior (Briscoe et al., 2012), salary and promotions (Verbruggen, 2012) and negatively to organizational commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009). Findings on its relationship with job and career satisfaction have been mixed so far (Enache et al., 2011; Verbruggen, 2012).

For unemployed individuals, psychological mobility can be defined as a jobseeker's openness towards different career options, including jobs that deviate from the previous job(s) and/or jobs that are not in line with one's educational background (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). This type of psychological mobility thus concerns the unemployed jobseeker's receptivity to cross different career boundaries. This attitude is generally expected to enhance a jobseeker's search outcomes (Forret et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010), like the number of job interviews or job offers a person receives (Koen et al. 2010; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000). However, the few studies that examined psychological mobility with unemployed individuals focused on its antecedents (e.g. Forret et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010); hence, its actual value for the job search process remains to be investigated (Forret et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). This study addresses this gap.

Psychological Mobility and Job Search Success

As shown in Figure 4, we expect psychological mobility to have both a positive and a negative impact on a jobseeker's search success, in particular on the number of job offers received. First, we expect a positive impact on job search success through job search behavior. A long history of theory and research has shown that attitudes are reliable predictors of behaviors (e.g. Ajzen, 1985; Bagozzi, 1992), also in the domain of job search (e.g. Kanfer, Wanberg & Kantrowitz, 2001). The most widely studied job search behavior is without doubt job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001). Job search intensity refers to the frequency with which jobseekers, during a set period of time, engage in several job search activities, like visiting job websites, discussing job leads with friends and sending out résumés to prospective employers (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005). Research has found job search intensity to be affected by several attitudes, including work commitment, job search self-efficacy and attitudes towards unemployment. (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, Kanfer & Rotundo, 1999; Zikic & Saks, 2009). In this study, we expect job search intensity to be positively affected by psychological mobility. Since psychologically mobile individuals are open towards many different career options, they are likely to both spend more time exploring these options and to use more diverse search channels – two aspects contributing to a higher job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001). A recent study among employed individuals has indeed found a specific form of psychological mobility, i.e. having a boundaryless mindset, to have a positive impact on job search behavior (Briscoe et al., 2012).

Hypothesis 1a. Psychological mobility relates positively to job search intensity.

Next, in line with earlier studies, we expect job search intensity to positively impact a job seeker's search success (Bradley & Taylor, 1992; Coté, Saks & Zikic, 2006; Saks, 2006; Saks &

Ashfort, 2000). Jobseekers who search more intensely are in general more aware of job openings and they put in more applications. In addition, their application skills are likely to improve faster since they spend more time on it. Therefore, they are likely to be invited to more job interviews, which in turn can enhance their chances of getting a job offer. Indeed, earlier studies have shown job search intensity to positively impact the number of job interviews (Bradley & Taylor, 1992; Coté et al., 2006; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashfort, 2000), which has been found to positively affect the number of job offers (Coté et al., 2006; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000).

Hypothesis 1b. Job search intensity relates positively to the number of job interviews.

Hypothesis 1c. The number of job interviews relates positively to the number of job offers.

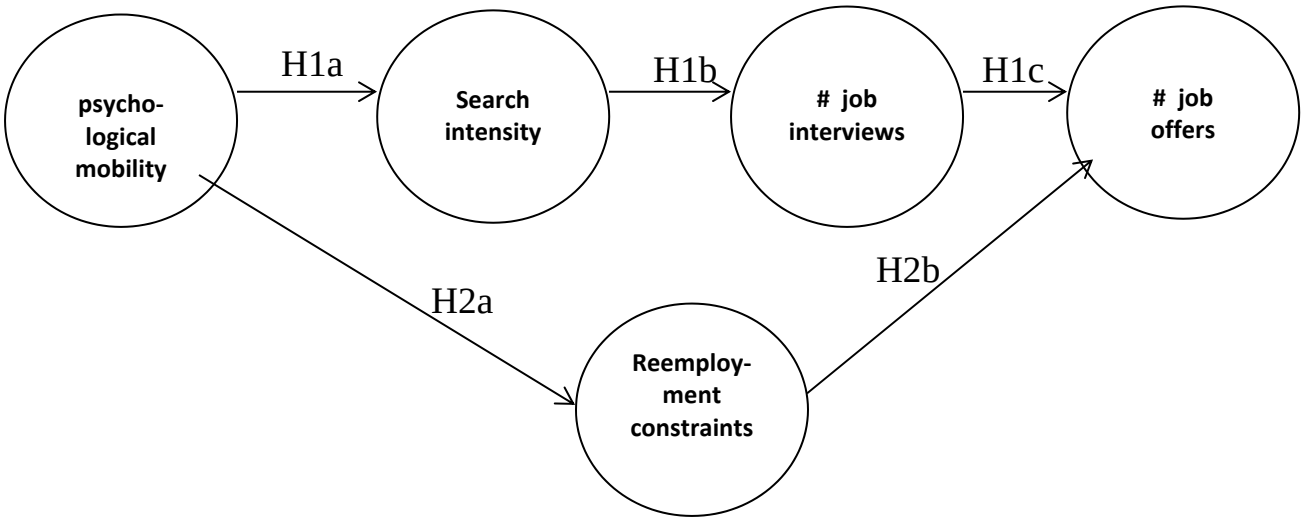
Next to this positive path, we believe that psychological mobility may also have a negative impact on the number of job offers through reemployment constraints. Reemployment constraints refer to barriers job seekers experience to getting a job offer (Doyen & Lamberts, 2001). Examples include crossing employers who want more job-related experience or a different educational background and feeling too insecure when performing job interviews. We expect psychologically mobile individuals to experience more reemployment constraints. Most organizations base their hiring decisions – at least in part – on the perceived fit between the job requirements and the applicant's characteristics, like experience and aspirations (Bretz, Rynes & Gerhart, 1993; Judge & Ferris, 1992). Evidence even suggests that firms rather leave a vacancy unfilled than hire an applicant who has not the required skills and motivation (Crequer, 1997; European Industrial Relations Review, 2005). It is therefore likely that individuals with high levels of psychological mobility experience more difficulties in convincing employers that they are a good match for the job. Not only may they apply more often for jobs which are not in line with their earlier experience and education, their high openness to different career options may

signal that they have no clear career focus, have little ambition and/or are little motivated for the specific job they are applying for. In addition, jobseekers who are open to many different career options may feel more insecure and have more difficulties in tuning their solicitation skills to the specific type of jobs they are looking for (McArdle et al., 2007; Koen et al., 2010). As such, psychologically mobile jobseekers may experience more reemployment constraints than their less psychological mobile counterparts. This is in turn likely to be negatively related to the number of job offers.

Hypothesis 2a. Psychological mobility relates positively to perceived reemployment constraints.

Hypothesis 2b. Perceived reemployment constraints relate negatively to the number of job offers.

Figure 4. Hypothesized model between psychological mobility and search success.



Method

Procedures and Participants

We collected data with Belgian unemployed jobseekers in the spring of 2010 through a large online survey. Individuals could participate in the study if they did not have any paid job during the previous four weeks and if they were actively searching for a new paid job. Participants were voluntarily recruited by two widespread weekly job magazines, one published in Dutch and targeting the Flemish population; the other serving the French-speaking Belgians. The data were collected through a bilingual website. Radio spots and advertisements were used to encourage participation.

A total of 3805 unemployed jobseekers filled in the questionnaire. For this study, we restricted the sample to respondents who had been unemployed for at most 3 years and who had been employed before. A longer time frame would make it too difficult for the respondents to accurately compare their search criteria with the characteristics of their previous job, whereas an accurate comparison was needed in order to fill in correctly the measurement of psychological mobility. The total sample for this study contains 1840 respondents. The average age was 40.18 (s.d. = 10.77). About half of the sample were male (48%) and half female (52%). The majority was Dutch-speaking (73%) and had at least an undergraduate degree (54%). Respondents had on average been unemployed for 10.41 months (s.d. = 15.32).

Measures

Psychological mobility was measured with a 9-item scale. The scale is based on previous research regarding the willingness to accept a job (Sverko et al., 2008; Van den Broeck et al., 2010) as well as on the expectations policy makers typically have concerning jobseekers' attitudes (Venn, 2012). Respondents indicated the extent to which they were willing to accept a

job that, among others, demanded a significant amount of retraining; offered a lower wage and required more commuting time. Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally). Exploratory factor analysis showed that the items belonged to one scale. The Cronbach alpha-coefficient was 0.71.

Search intensity was assessed by the 9-item scale of Blau (1994). Participants pointed out how frequently they had used a variety of search sources or performed certain search behaviors during the last 3 months on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 0 times; 5 = very often, at least 10 times). Sample items included “Reading job advertisements in the paper”, “Visiting job websites”, “Contacting employment agencies”, “Discussing job leads with friends or relatives”. Similar scales were successfully used in previous research (Zikic & Saks, 2009; Sverko et al., 2008; Coté et al., 2006; Van Hooft et al., 2004; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg et al., 1999 amongst others). The reliability of this scale was $\alpha = 0.81$.

Reemployment constraints were measured with 4 items based on Doyen & Lamberts (2001). The items represent obstacles that especially psychologically mobile unemployed jobseekers may experience in their job search process. Respondents indicated how often they had to deal with obstacles like being insecure during job interviews or employers who demand more work experience, a different educational background or who find the wage demands too high. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (usually not) to 5 (almost always). In line with other measures of reemployment constraints (e.g. Wanberg et al., 2010), we approach reemployment constraints as an index; that is, we do not expect the different constraints to necessarily occur simultaneously, but we do want higher scores to point to respondents perceiving more reemployment constraints (Bollen & Lennox., 1991). In line with

the approach of Wanberg et al. (2010), we calculated the reemployment index by summing the scores on the four items.

Job search success was measured using two indicators, namely the number of job interviews and the number of job offers received in the last three months. Both measures have been extensively used in previous research as indicators of job search success (e.g. Koen et al. 2010; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000). For respondents who were unemployed less than three months, we adapted the measure in proportion to their unemployment duration. Dropping this population group from the analyses did not impair our results, so we decided to continue with the complete dataset and to use the adapted measurements.

Gender, age, education, unemployment duration, previous employment position, tenure at last job, job search commitment, reemployment efficacy and family responsibilities were used as control variables, since they are regularly controlled for in job search research (e.g. Sverko et al., 2008; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Additionally, we took up the net wage in the previous job, work motivation and a dummy which distinguished French- and Dutch-speaking respondents.

Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypotheses of this study since it allows testing multiple relationships simultaneously. The goodness of fit indices show that our hypothesized model has a good fit: $\chi^2[5] = 5.75$, $p = .33$; GFI = 1.00; AGFI = .98; CFI = 1.00; NFI = 1.00; SRMSR= 0.00; RMSEA = 0.01. However, modification indices showed that adding an additional path from psychological mobility to the number of job offers would even further improve the fit ($Pr > \chi^2 = 0.04$). The fit of this improved model is: $\chi^2[4] = 1.30$, $p = .86$; GFI = 1.00; AGFI = 1.00; CFI = 1.00; NFI = 1.00; SRMSR= 0.00; RMSEA = 0.00. In the following section, we discuss the results of this modified model.

Results

First, we performed confirmatory factor analyses (CFA's) to test whether our scales are conceptually different. In table 3, we compare our proposed measurement model with a number of possible alternatives. Our original model consists of three correlated factors represented by 22 items: nine items of psychological mobility, nine items of search intensity and four items of reemployment constraints. The fit of this model is $\chi^2[187] = 1101.70$, p = .00; SRMSR= 0.06; RMSEA = 0.05; CFI = 0.91; NFI = 0.90. As table 3 demonstrates, the four alternative models do not show a better fit than this original model, which supports the distinctiveness of our used scales.

Table 3. Goodness-of-fit indices and model comparisons for the measurement model.

	χ^2	*df*	*p*	χ^2/df	CFI	NFI	SRMR	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$
Original model (22 items on 3 factors)	1101.70	187	.00	5.89	.91	.90	.06	.05	
Model with common factor psych mobility-intensity	2550.21	189	.00	13.49	.77	.76	.10	.08	1448.51**
Model with common factor psych mobility-constraints	1544.05	189	.00	8.17	.87	.85	.07	.06	442.35**
Model with common factor intensity-constraints	1550.22	189	.00	8.20	.87	.85	.07	.06	448.52**
Common factor model	2989.83	189	.00	15.82	.73	.72	.11	.09	1888.13**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables. On average, an unemployed respondent was invited to 3.87 job interviews and got 0.69 job offers during the last three months. There was a positive correlation between psychological mobility and job search intensity (r = 0.27, $p < 0.01$), as well as between job search intensity and the number of

job interviews (r = 0.33, $p < 0.01$). There was no significant correlation between psychological mobility and reemployment constraints, whereas a significant negative correlation was found between reemployment constraints and the number of job offers (r = -0.12; $p < 0.01$). No significant correlation was found between psychological mobility and the number of job offers.

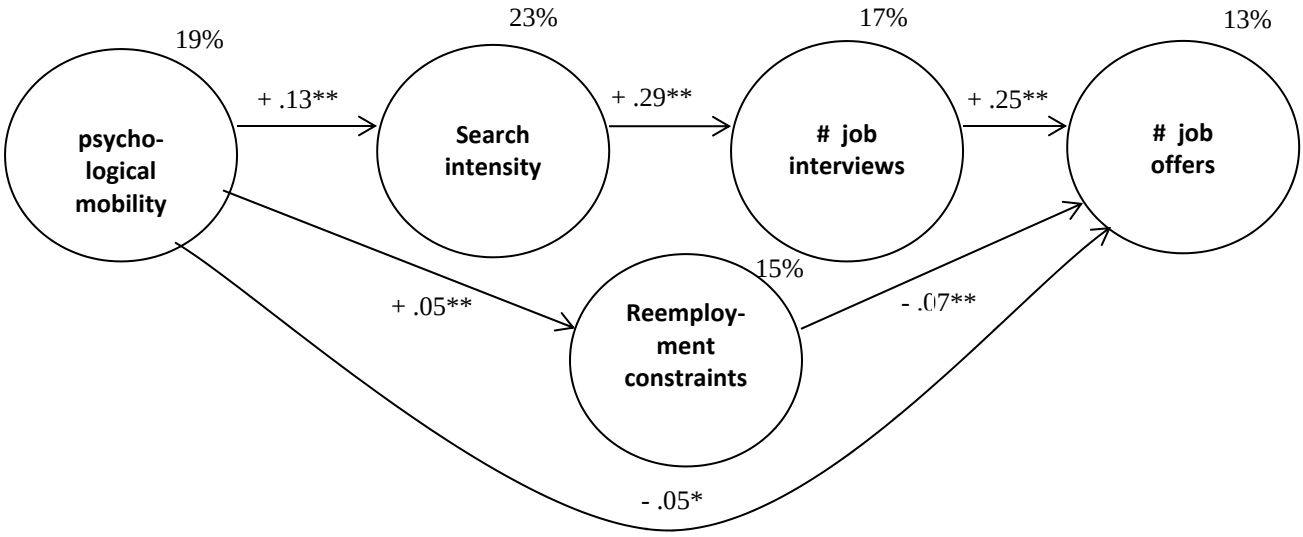
The results of the path analysis, presented in Figure 5, first of all provide support for the expected positive path between psychological mobility and job search success through job search intensity. In line with hypotheses 1a to 1c, we found psychological mobility to positively affect job search intensity (β = 0.13, $p < 0.01$); job search intensity to have a positive impact on the number of job interviews (β = 0.29, $p < 0.01$) and the number of job interviews to relate positively to the number of job offers (β = 0.25, $p < 0.01$). Next to this positive path, the results also corroborate the proposed indirect negative impact of psychological mobility on the number of job offers through reemployment constraints. Psychological mobility has a positive impact on reemployment constraints (β = 0.05, $p < 0.05$), which in turn is negatively related to the number of job offers (β = -0.07, $p < 0.01$). This is in line with hypothesis 2a and 2b. However, the modification indices showed that the fit of the model could further be improved by adding a direct path of psychological mobility on the number of job offers (β = -0.05, $p < 0.05$). Hence, the negative impact of psychological mobility on the number of job offers is only partially mediated by reemployment constraints.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations between Study Variables (n = 1840)

Variable	Mean (sd)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Gender	0.52 (0.50)																	
2. Age	40.18 (10.77)	-.14**																
3. Language	0.27 (0.45)	-.21	.01															
4. Children	0.47 (0.50)	.06*	.23**	.11**														
5. Unemployment duration	10.41 (15.32)	-.07**	.22**	.07*	-.13**													
6. Employment duration previous job	59.36 (83.60)	-.12**	.43**	-.06	.09*	.00												
7. Number of employers	1.56 (1.93)	.07**	-.25**	-.02	-.07	-.08*	-.38**											
8. Employment commitment	4.17 (0.76)	-.03	.05	.14**	.08*	.05	-.13**	.05										
9. Previous unemployed	0.39 (0.49)	.07**	-.12**	.09**	-.05	-.13**	-.21**	-.24**	.07*									
10. Reemployment efficacy	2.04 (0.75)	-.02	-.19**	-.11**	-.01	-.24**	-.03	.01	-.21**	-.05								
11. Wage in previous job	7.49 (0.40)	-.17**	.31**	.02	.25**	-.19**	.31**	-.19**	-.07*	-.13**	.03							
12. Intrinsically motivated	8.02 (1.55)	.08**	.13**	.07	.13**	-.11**	.01	-.07*	.34**	-.03	.04	.14**						
13. Extrinsically motivated	5.76 (1.73)	.01	-.11**	.02	.08*	-.04	-.12**	.10**	.20**	.03	-.05	-.15**	.31**					
14. Number of job interviews	3.87 (4.92)	-.02	-.11**	-.01	.07*	-.16**	-.10**	.12**	.17**	.07*	.07*	.04	.16**	.13**				
15. Job offers	0.69 (1.43)	.03	-.13**	.01	-.01	-.12**	-.03	.03	.01	.04	.23**	-.02	.07*	-.06	.28**			
16. Search intensity	3.33 (0.79)	.07**	.05	.10**	.16**	-.05	-.07*	.04	.35**	-.01	-.16**	-.00	.30**	.21**	.33**	.05		
17. Psychological mobility	2.74 (0.61)	-.14**	.06	.28**	.07*	.04	-.06	.02	.27**	.06	-.04	.02	.24**	.26**	.10**	.01	.27**	
18. Reemployment constraints	11.02 (2.96)	.06**	-.03	.01	-.04	.12**	.01	.01	-.02	.05*	-.21**	-.18**	-.07**	.19**	-.07**	-.12**	.02	.04

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Figure 5. Standardized path coefficients of the relationship between psychological mobility and search success.



Note: ** coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level; * coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level.

To know which of the two paths, i.e. the negative or the positive path, is most decisive, we have a look at the total effect. Overall, we found the total effect of psychological mobility on the number of job offers to be significantly negative (-0.05; p = 0.06). This indicates that the negative paths offsets and even counteracts the positive one.

Discussion

In this study, we investigated whether there are boundaries to psychological mobility during unemployment. In particular, we examined the impact of the willingness to accept a job that differs from one's former job on the number of job offers an unemployed jobseeker receives. Overall, our results indicate that unemployed individuals who are psychologically mobile are not only rewarded in the job search process. Even though psychologically mobile individuals spend more time searching for a job and are invited more often to a selection interview, they also experience more reemployment constraints which negatively impacts their number of received job offers. This finding suggests that psychologically mobile jobseekers may have more

difficulty to convince employers that they are a good fit. They may also feel insecure because they do not have the necessary experience or perhaps employers more often question their motivation for the job. In addition to this hypothesized indirect path, we also found indications for a direct negative impact of psychological mobility on the number of job offers. The fact that we found this direct path in addition to the indirect path via reemployment constraints shows that we could only grasp part of what happens in the negative path by focusing on the constraints jobseekers experience themselves. Probably, if employers have the choice between two applicants, with one having a larger fit to the vacant function than the other, they may indeed be more likely to choose the applicant whose profile fits best. However, jobseekers may not always fully perceive this selection process during their job interview, which might explain why we only find a partial mediation effect of perceived reemployment constraints. Anyway, for the unemployed individual, the finding that psychological mobility also results in a negative impact on the number of job offers, implies that there are limitations to – or at least preconditions for – the value of psychological mobility. By this result, our study points to a potential downside of new careers and makes an important contribution to the existing career literature (Briscoe et al., 2006; King, 2004). In the notions of the boundaryless and self-directed careers, being able to adjust swiftly to different work and career circumstances is deemed indispensable (e.g. Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004; Hall, 2004; Koen et al., 2010; Mervish & Hall, 1994). However, our results indicate that psychological mobility or people's willingness to cross boundaries cannot straightforwardly be associated with positive career outcomes in every context or subpopulation. This points to the necessity of not only taking into account 'agency' but also 'structure' to fully grasp the outcomes of boundaryless career attitudes (Tams & Arthur, 2010).

Practical Implications

Firstly, our finding that psychologically mobile individuals is also negatively linked to the number of job offers, seems to suggest that employers do not (yet) regard people's psychological mobility in a positive way; or at least that they do not select jobseekers based on their psychological mobility. Yet, a flexible workforce is generally considered to be a necessity for organizations to survive and stay competitive in today's turbulent environment (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). HR managers may therefore want to reflect on their current selection practice and evaluate their impact on the firm's overall adaptability.

Next, our results are insightful for policymakers. From a labor market perspective, psychological mobility is generally seen as a positive attitude which should be enhanced as it could potentially reduce unemployment duration (Venn, 2012). However, our findings showed that this attitude may not be unilaterally positive. Do these results then advise against enhancing this attitude among the unemployed? Not necessarily; they rather caution against using this policy inconsiderately. Additional measures may be needed in order for the positive impact of psychological mobility to dominate the negative one. Firstly, employers should be encouraged to be more open towards candidates who are psychologically mobile. Employers may sometimes apply too strict selection criteria when hiring new personnel. Especially in a time where vacancies are increasingly left unfilled, hiring applicants who may appear less fitting at first sight may turn out to be a worthwhile strategy. Secondly, because employers are sometimes doubtful to hire psychologically mobile jobseekers, job seekers themselves may have to be extra cogent towards employers. It may be helpful to offer them extra guidance in their job search process to be so. For psychologically mobile jobseekers it is especially important that they are able to communicate clearly and convincingly the grounds for their new career direction. The

importance of careful support through targeted training and guidance to new work should therefore not be overlooked in this process. Hence, our results also emphasize an important task for employment services and reemployment counselors. Counselors should pay special attention to psychologically mobile jobseekers and help them to emphasize the strengths of their mobile attitude as to better convince potential employers of their capabilities. On the other hand, counselors should also point out to psychologically mobile jobseekers that it is a buyer's market and advise them not to burn energy on unlikely job opportunities and to be tactical in seeking to project what employers want. That is, it is important that interview behavior complements the potential benefits of psychological boundarylessness and counselors can help to align both. In addition, counselors should also work on the uncertainty that psychologically mobile jobseekers sometimes feel in their application process and offer techniques to reduce this. As such, psychological mobility may no longer be considered aversive by future employers or recruiters, but can be converted in an attitude with a positive connotation.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are a number of limitations in this study, which warrant caution in interpreting the findings. First, because our data were cross-sectional in nature, we are not able to rule out reverse causality. However, the proposed directions are in line with findings from earlier studies – including longitudinal one's – on attitudes, behaviors and success in job search (Brasher & Chen, 1999; Koen et al. 2010; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000).

Second, our measure for psychological mobility was self-created. Though the development of this measure was based on previous research (Sverko et al., 2008; Van den Broeck et al., 2010) as well as on the expectations of policymakers with regard to the search attitude of unemployed individuals, it might be necessary for future research to fine-tune it. It could for

instance be interesting for future research to look at different types of psychological mobility (e.g. with regard to job content versus work location versus wage), since not all types may cause the same effects.

Third, because we only collected data with unemployed jobseekers and not with recruiters, we were unable to further unravel what happened in the "negative" path. For future research, it could be interesting to look more in-depth at the employer-side of the story, for instance by comparing the profile of the actual hired applicants with the profile set out in the job opening. This would enable us to define if psychological mobility is in fact punished in the job search process and what exactly employers find offsetting. In addition, future research should try to match recruitment and job search theory. Up to now, few empirical studies and even fewer theoretical frameworks have tried to combine the perspectives of recruiters and individual jobseekers, whereas this could significantly increase our understanding of job search success in general and of why the negative effect of psychological mobility offsets the positive effect.

Fourth, it could be very useful to repeat similar research in a longitudinal setting by taking up multiple measurement points over time. As such, for those who remain unemployed, the evolution of search flexibility over time could be scrutinized, whereas for those who find a job the match between the search flexible attitude and the actual chosen job could be investigated. Moreover, instead of solely observing the number of job offers as outcome of success, one could then also look at the actual chance of finding a job and at the quality of the chosen job (cf. Koen et al., 2010; Van Hooft et al., 2005; Wanberg, 1999; Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

Finally, this study focused on psychological mobility among a specific population, namely unemployed jobseekers. We therefore used a definition of psychological mobility that fitted with how scholars (e.g. Van den Broeck et al., 2010) and policymakers (e.g. Venn, 2012) interpret this

concept for this population. However, the specific meaning of psychological mobility may differ depending on the profile of the individuals that are under study and therefore, the effects of this attitude may differ as well. Future research should further try to grasp the different interpretations that can be given to the concept for different populations and examine how the outcomes of this attitude differ depending on the specific meaning and population under study.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of a psychologically mobile attitude of unemployed jobseekers on job search success. Our results showed that psychologically mobile jobseekers spend more time searching for a job and are invited more often to a selection interview, which in turn leads to receiving more job offers. However, our analysis also demonstrated that this positive path is counteracted by a negative one. Jobseekers with a mobile mind-set more often experience reemployment constraints, which results in less job offers. Overall, this study indicates that there are limitations to – or at least preconditions for – the value of psychological mobility for unemployed job seekers.

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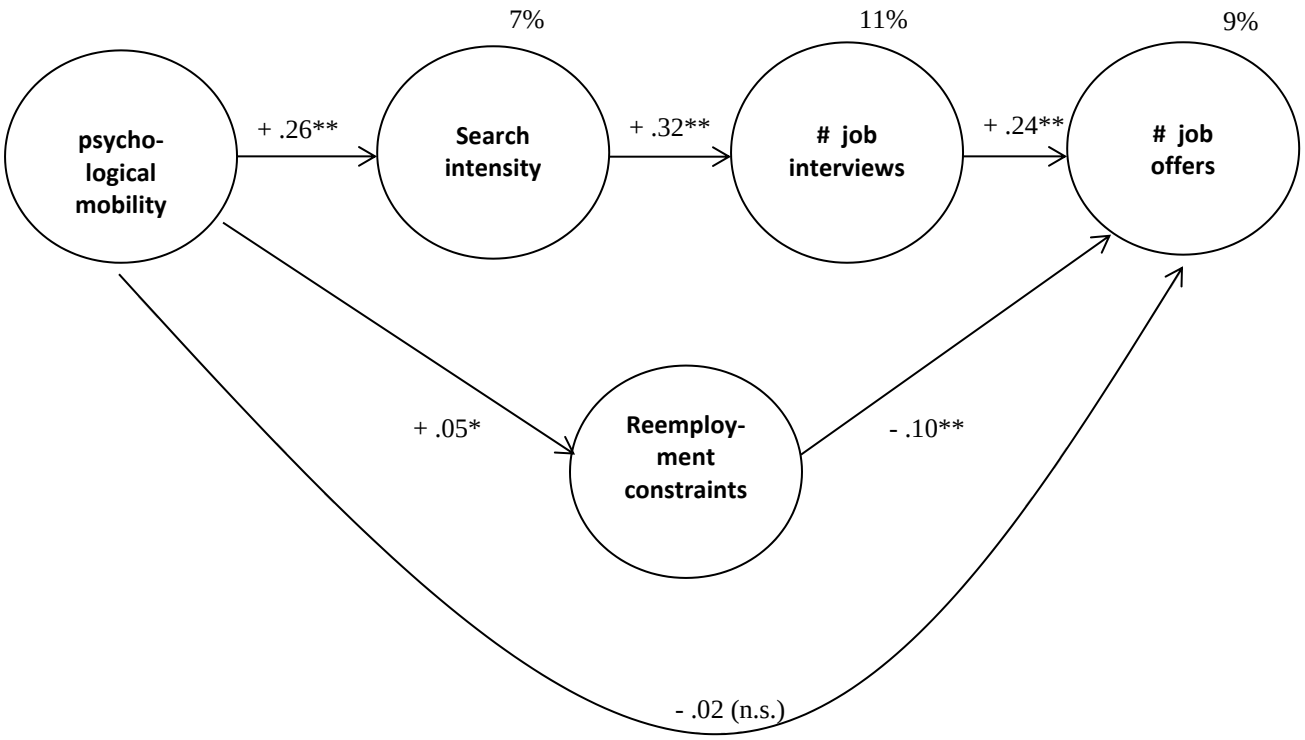
Appendix

We retested the model presented in figure 5, using only gender and age as control variables. By performing this extra analysis, we want to demonstrate that the model fit and also the path-weights presented in Figure 5 are not due to the generous selection of suitable control variables. The fit of this new model is $\chi^2[5]=15.54$, p=.01; SRMR=0.02; RMSEA=0.03; CFI=0.98, NFI=0.98. The total effect of psychological mobility on the number of job offers is negative, but no longer significant. In addition, the direct path from psychological mobility to the number of job offers is not significant anymore. Hence, we find a full mediation of reemployment constraints in this reduced model.



CHAPTER 3.

FLEXIBLE JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR AMONG UNEMPLOYED JOBSEEKERS: ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES.[2]

Abstract

The interest in flexible job search behavior among unemployed jobseekers, i.e., the extent to which jobseekers also look for jobs that deviate from their studies and earlier work experience, has grown considerably in recent years. Both scholars and policymakers believe that this type of job search behavior is important for the unemployed and can improve their employment prospects. Up to now however, few empirical studies have focused on this topic. Consequently, little is known about who actually searches in a flexible way and whether a flexible search actually affects one's reemployment chances. With this study, we aim to address this gap. We distinguish three types of flexible job search behavior: flexibility with respect to pay and hierarchical level, flexibility with respect to skill use and flexibility with respect to commuting time. We examine how these types are related with situational and individual antecedents of job search behavior and with job search success. Results indicate that especially those without a clear career plan in mind and who are less optimistic about their labor market prospects search for less paying/lower level jobs and for jobs that demand different skills. Also those who are more adaptable in the career search more often for jobs in different professions. On the other hand, individuals feeling less financially or more socially pressurized, or who are more committed to work or adaptable in the career search more for jobs that demand more extensive commuting time. Results also show that none of the three types of flexible job search behavior improves one's reemployment success. Implications of these results are discussed.

Keywords: flexible job search behavior, unemployment, situational variables, individual difference variables, job search success

[2] This article has been granted the best poster award at the Positive Occupational Health Psychology conference held on September 12th-13th 2013. It has also been awarded with the second youth price at the Dutch Labor Market Day (Nederlandse Arbeidsmarktdag) held on October 10th 2013.

Introduction

In this study, we examine antecedents and outcomes of flexible job search behavior among unemployed jobseekers. Flexible job search behavior refers to the extent to which jobseekers look for jobs that deviate from their studies and earlier work experience (Van den Broeck, 2010; Venn, 2012). In recent years, flexible job search behavior has received increasing attention of both policymakers and scholars. Policymakers of many countries are confronted with an increased difficulty to match supply and demand on the labor market (European Commission, 2012). This is due to a rising mismatch between the characteristics and requirements of available jobs on the one hand and jobseekers' preferences and skills on the other (Barlevy, 2011; Kosfeld, Dreger & Eckey, 2008; Herremans, Braes, Sels & Vanderbiesen, 2011). Many policymakers believe that this issue can (partly) be resolved by (more) flexibility on behalf of the unemployed and therefore stimulate unemployed individuals to broaden their job search and take into account job opportunities that deviate from their initial preferences. In addition, they expect positive effects of flexible job search behavior on the reemployment of unemployed jobseekers (e.g., Grubb, 2001; Venn, 2012), as this type of job search behavior may positively influence people's search effort and as such their chances of being hired. Moreover, as flexible jobseekers are less picky, they may accept a job offer faster which also may increase their reemployment likelihood. Because of these positive connotations on flexibility, almost all OECD countries have legislation in which they demand unemployed individuals to search in a flexible way for a new job on a number of aspects, like *pay level* (i.e., an unemployed individual must also search for and accept jobs which offer a lower wage than the previous job or than the usual wage for that occupation), *job content* (i.e., an unemployed individual must also search for and accept jobs in other occupational areas than his/her previous job or studies), and *commuting time* (i.e., an

unemployed individual must also search for and accept jobs which demand a certain predetermined transportation time) (Ministry of Finance, 1998; Hasselpflug, 2005; Venn, 2012).

In addition to policymakers, career scholars also find flexible job search behavior in unemployed jobseekers important. Career scholars attach a general importance to flexibility—or what is often referred to as *adaptability*—as a competence in today's career landscape. The prevailing notion in career research suggests that in the last decades, traditional, steady career paths guided by employers have increasingly been replaced by so-called "protean" and "boundaryless" careers, i.e., careers in which the onus rests on individuals themselves and where physical boundaries are blurred and can easily be crossed (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2004). In this career vision, being able to adjust swiftly to different work and career circumstances—i.e., being adaptable—is deemed indispensable when one makes a transition (e.g., Hall, 2004; Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic & Nauta, 2010; Mervish & Hall, 1994). Since unemployed jobseekers are on the eve of a transition, being adaptable is considered a necessary career skill for them (e.g., Koen et al., 2010). Moreover, it is believed that flexibility will help unemployed individuals regain a job (e.g., Van den Broeck et al., 2010). It is anticipated that employers will try to attract flexible individuals, since companies are increasingly working in a turbulent environment and are in need of human flexibility to address this context (e.g. Lawler, 1994; Peiró, García-Montalvo & Gracia, 2002). Employers are therefore believed to increasingly hire individuals who demonstrate flexibility (Van den Broeck et al., 2010).

Despite the importance attached to flexibility by both policymakers and career scholars, few empirical research has been done on this matter. As such, at present, it is not known which jobseekers search in a flexible way. Yet, more insight of the profile of flexible jobseekers is relevant in order to understand the effects of this type of behavior. In addition, research has not

yet investigated whether flexible job search behavior actually leads to more reemployment success, as is expected from policymakers and career scholars. It is for instance also possible that individuals who search flexibly may be perceived as fitting less well with the organization and the vacant job as they have to make more sacrifices or have less relevant working experience (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005; Kulik, Roberson & Perry, 2007). As such flexible unemployed jobseekers may receive less job offers. Recent empirical research indeed sheds doubt on policymakers' and career scholars' believe that flexibility enhances people's chances of finding a new job. Vansteenkiste, Verbruggen and Sels (2013) investigated whether a flexible *attitude* during unemployment constrains or stimulates one's job search success and found that unemployed jobseekers who adopt a flexible attitude receive less job offers. However, one of the downsides of their study is that it is cross-sectional and, consequently, does not look at the actual reemployment likelihood of unemployed jobseekers, nor at actual job search behavior.

As few empirical studies have investigated who searches flexibly and whether this behavior leads to reemployment success (Van den Broeck, 2010; Venn, 2012), with this study, we try to expand the current understanding of flexible job search behavior by examining its antecedents and outcomes. To better understand who searches in a flexible way, we examine whether situational (financial hardship, subjective norms) and individual difference variables (employment commitment, reemployment efficacy, career adaptability and career planning) affect to which extent job seekers search in a flexible way (cf., Wanberg, Watt & Rumsey, 1996; Koen et al., 2010). In addition, we investigate whether flexible job search behavior leads to reemployment success. Hereto, we re-examine the model of Vansteenkiste et al. (2013) for flexible job search behavior and extend and adapt it by examining the model in a longitudinal

context and by looking at the reemployment likelihood in addition to the number of job offers and studying one's flexible job search behavior rather than flexible job search attitude.

This study makes several contributions. First, by focussing on flexible job search behavior, we address the demand for a broader approach towards job search behavior (e.g., Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Indeed, up to now, most studies have concentrated on unemployed individuals' job search intensity (Kanfer, Wanberg & Kantrowitz, 2001; Saks, 2005) or job search strategy (Crossly & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010), whereas much more insight into the unemployment process can be gained from introducing and studying new types of measures of job search behavior (cf. Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Second, by examining the impact of flexible job search behavior on reemployment success, we address the calls for more studies on the outcomes of this job search behavior (Van den Broeck et al., 2010) and try to provide more insight into whether flexibility indeed helps to find reemployment or not. More accurate information on this topic could help to assess the impact and prerequisites of a re-orientation policy more accurately, and to formulate recommendations on measures that could support such a policy. Third, by investigating the antecedents of flexible job search behavior, we can know better which jobseekers search in a flexible way, which could help understanding if they have special counseling needs and helps interpreting the outcomes of flexible job search behavior on job search success.

Flexible job search behavior (FJSB)

Behavior versus attitude

In this study, we focus on Flexible Job Search Behavior (FJSB). Hence, we choose to study flexibility as a job search *behavior* and not *attitude*. The limited research on flexibility among unemployed job seekers has mainly focused on flexibility as an attitude (Van den Broeck

et al., 2010; Vansteenkiste et al., 2013). Attitudes and behavior are however not always closely interrelated. In this respect, scholars coin the term 'evaluative inconsistency' to refer to "failures of general attitudes to predict a given behavior with respect to the object of the attitude" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005, p. 185). One of the explanations for these inconsistencies is that people who have a certain attitude may behave in different ways (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Thurstone, 1931), and as such, attitudes can be harder to link to outcomes than behaviors. In addition, a focus on behavior rather than attitudes is also in line with what OECD policymakers expect from unemployed jobseekers. Unemployed jobseekers are for instance required to some degree to actually search flexibly for a job with respect to wage, job content and commuting time (Ministry of Finance, 1998; Hasselplug, 2005; Venn, 2012). Public employment services are also better able to monitor job search behavior than a certain mindset or attitude. For these reasons, we decided to focus on flexibility as a job search behavior in this study.

A multidimensional construct

In addition, we consider FJSB to be a multidimensional construct. Research suggests that people weigh different components in the selection of their future job (Boswell, Roehling, LePine & Moynihan, 2003; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin & Jones, 2005; Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow & Si, 2001). In this decision process, one component (e.g. wage) often outweighs other components (e.g. commuting time) or a particular component is decisive when choosing a new job. In parallel, unemployed persons may search for a new job in a flexible way on a particular dimension, but not on another dimension, which makes it useful to distinguish different dimensions instead of using a general flexibility construct (cf. Vansteenkiste et al., 2013).

In line with the flexibility demands OECD policymakers generally request from unemployed individuals and building on the literature related to the job choice process—i.e., the job design, job fit, willingness to sacrifice, and underemployment literature— we distinguish three dimensions of FJSB: flexibility with respect to wage/hierarchical level, job content and commuting time.

First, OECD policymakers often expect FJSB from unemployed individuals in terms of *pay*, i.e., an unemployed individual must also search for and accept jobs that offers a lower wage than his or her previous job or than the usual wage for that occupation (Hasselpflug, 2005; Ministry of Finance, 1998; Venn, 2012). The pay/hierarchical level has also proven to play an important role when deciding on a new job (e.g., Boswell et al., 2003; Osborn, 1990; Konrad, Edgar, Lieb & Corrigall, 2000). The amount unemployed jobseekers want to be paid in a future job varies widely, with some jobseekers willing to make concessions upon the wage of their previous job, whereas others not (Feldstein & Poterba, 1984; Jones, 1989; Hogan, 2004). Hogan (2004) indicated that around 60% of British jobseekers have wage demands that are less than their previous wage. Along the same lines, a group of Belgian and Dutch scholars, who between the 1970s and 1990s studied the sacrifices unemployed jobseekers are willing to make when offered jobs, also found that the pay/hierarchical level is one of the main aspects unemployed individuals make concessions upon (e.g., Deleeck, Van Hoye, Janssens & Peeters, 1988; Kloosterman, 1987; Kroft, Engbersen, Schuyt & Van Waarden, 1989; Miltenburg & Woldringh, 1990; Van Wezel, 1972). This type of job search behavior also corresponds to one of the frequently studied dimensions of underemployment, namely pay/hierarchical underemployment (being underpaid or at a lower hierarchical level compared with the previous job or level of education) (e.g., McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011)

Second, OECD policymakers require, to some extent, that unemployed individuals search flexibly with respect to their *job content or skill usage*, i.e., an unemployed individual must also look for and accept jobs in other occupational areas than his or her previous job or studies (Hasselpflug, 2005; Ministry of Finance, 1998; Venn, 2012). Literature suggests that this is also one of the key factors jobseekers take into account when deciding on a new job (Boswell et al., 2003; Chapman et al., 2005; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987; Turban, Eyring & Campion, 1993; Turban et al., 2001). Job fit theory (Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) indicates that people evaluate the extent to which job demands coincide with their knowledge, skills, and abilities. However, unemployed individuals are not always in a position to look for jobs that fit best with their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Research suggests that in order to find reemployment, a large proportion of unemployed jobseekers (up to 50% and more) are willing to accept jobs that require retraining (e.g., Kloosterman, 1987; Kroft et al., 1989; Miltenburg & Woldringh, 1990; Van Wezel, 1972). Moreover, jobseekers often end up in jobs for which they are overskilled (e.g., Green & McIntosh, 2007; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

Third, OECD policymakers have also developed legislation regarding the *commuting time* and expect unemployed job seekers to also search for and accept jobs that demand a certain, predetermined transportation time (Hasselpflug, 2005; Ministry of Finance, 1998; Venn, 2012). Several studies from the 1970s through the 1990s demonstrated that the majority of unemployed jobseekers (up to 54%) are willing to accept jobs for which they have to commute extensively (Deleeck et al., 1988; Kloosterman, 1987; Kroft et al., 1989; Miltenburg & Woldringh, 1990; Van Wezel, 1972). More recent research has also indicated that commuting time significantly influences jobseekers' decision to accept jobs (Boswell et al., 2003; Konrad et al., 2000; Turban, Forret & Hendrickson, 1998).

Hence, in our notion, FJSB refers to the extent to which jobseekers also apply for jobs that deviate in terms of pay/hierarchy, content and commuting time from their past jobs and/or previous training.

Flexible job search predictors

A first aim of this study is to examine antecedents of flexible job search behavior. In a review of the job search literature, Saks (2005) indicates that there are three categories of predictors of job search behavior: situational variables, individual difference variables and biographical variables. Situational predictors comprise jobseekers perceptions of the situation and include variables as financial hardship and social support (Kanfer et al., 2001; van Dam & Menting, 2012; Saks, 2005; Wanberg et al., 1996). Individual difference variables refer to characteristics of the jobseeker, such as personality variables (e.g., self-esteem), motivational factors (e.g., self-efficacy) and attitudes toward employment and work (e.g., employment commitment) (Saks, 2005; Wanberg et al., 1996). The last category of predictors that Saks (2005) distinguishes, are biographical variables, like gender, age, education and race. These have been proven to be only weakly related to job search behavior (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005). In this study, we therefore decided to only take up situational and individual difference variables and to simply control for biographical variables. This is in line with several studies of which the authors also only focused on situational or individual difference variables in their model (e.g., Coté, Saks & Zikic, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 1999; Wanberg et al., 1996; Wanberg, Kanfer & Rotundo, 1999).

First, we expect situational variables to predict the extent to which job seekers search flexibly. We take up two situational variables which have been included often in job search research, i.e. financial hardship and subjective norms (Kanfer et al., 2001; van Dam & Menting,

2012; Saks, 2005; Wanberg et al., 1996). Job seekers who are facing greater financial difficulties have a greater financial need to find work and will therefore often search more intensely in order to find a new job faster (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 1999). Also the expectation of close friends or family members to find work (i.e., subjective norms) can provide additional pressure during the job search, which can also translate into a more vigorous search (Zikic & Saks, 2009; Wanberg, Glomb, Song & Sorenson, 2005). Past research has demonstrated that people who experience more financial hardship or pressure from their close environment are more likely to develop an employment motive (van Dam & Menting, 2012). Individuals with an employment motive want to find employment fast and are not very selective in their job search, since they consider unemployment as a negative experience which they want to end as quickly as they can. This seems to correspond with people who search in a flexible way. As such, financial hardship and subjective norms may be positively related to FJSB. We therefore expect a positive relationship between financial hardship and subjective norms on the one hand and the different types of flexible job search on the other, with one exception. That is, for the relationship between financial hardship and commuting search flexibility, we expect a negative impact. This is because those who struggle financially often also have less means for transportation (like owning a car), and may therefore be inclined to search a job closer to home.

Hypothesis 1a. Financial hardship is positively related to flexible job search behavior with respect to pay/hierarchy and skills, and negatively related to commuting time flexible job search behavior.

Hypothesis 1b. Subjective norms is positively related to each dimension of flexible job search behavior.

Also individual differences are likely to explain differences in flexible job search behaviour. We include four individual difference variables: employment commitment, reemployment efficacy, career adaptability and career planning. Employment commitment and reemployment efficacy are individual difference variables that are often included in job search research (Saks, 2005). We expect opposing effects of both variables on FJSB. First, we expect a positive relationship between employment commitment and FJSB. Employment commitment indicates how important and central employment is to a job seeker (Kanfer et al. 2001; Rowley & Feather, 1987; Saks, 2005). Previous studies have related this attitude positively to job search behaviors, like job search intensity and effort (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 1999). People who are committed to work, do not want to stay unemployed for a long time and may therefore use a broader search scope than people who are less inclined to find reemployment. Hence, they may approach their job search in a more flexible way.

Hypothesis 2a. Employment commitment is positively related to each dimension of flexible job search behavior.

Next, we assume that the second individual difference variable, reemployment efficacy, is negatively related to FJSB. Reemployment efficacy refers to jobseekers perceived ability to find reemployment (Wanberg, Zhu & Van Hooft, 2010). If a jobseeker does not have much confidence in his chances on the labor market, he may set his standards for a new job lower and may therefore target a wider range of jobs, even jobs that are different in terms of previous working experience and educational background. Previous research demonstrates, for instance, that one's perceived reemployment chances reduces the demanded wage level in a new job (Christensen, 2001; Pannenberg, 2007). As such we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2b. Reemployment efficacy is negatively related to each dimension of flexible job search behavior.

Finally, we expect career adaptability and career planning to affect flexible job search behavior. Though career variables like these haven't been frequently included in job search studies, recent research has demonstrated that they can have significant predictive power for the job search process (Koen et al., 2010). Studying career variables in a job search context is relevant as it helps understanding how adaptive resources in the career impact the behavior one sets to make a career transition (here: from unemployment to employment) (Koen et al., 2010). We expect opposing effects from the two career variables on FJSB. First, we assume career adaptability to be positively related to FJSB. Career adaptability refers to an individual's willingness to change behavior, feelings and thoughts in response to changing environmental factors (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). Career adaptability has been shown to impact the degree to which people are willing to explore themselves and their environment and their ability to align their personal characteristics, such as knowledge and skills, to situational demands (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Chan, 2000; Savickas, 1997). Individuals high on career adaptability may therefore be more likely to explore different types of jobs, which may imply that they will be more flexible in their job search.

Hypothesis 3a. Career adaptability is positively related to each dimension of flexible job search behavior.

Next, we expect that career planning will be negatively related to FJSB. Career planning refers to having clear career goals and having a strategy to attain these goals (Gould, 1979; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Having less clear career goals may induce individuals to search for all types of jobs: jobs that are in line and not in line with previous job experience and/or educational

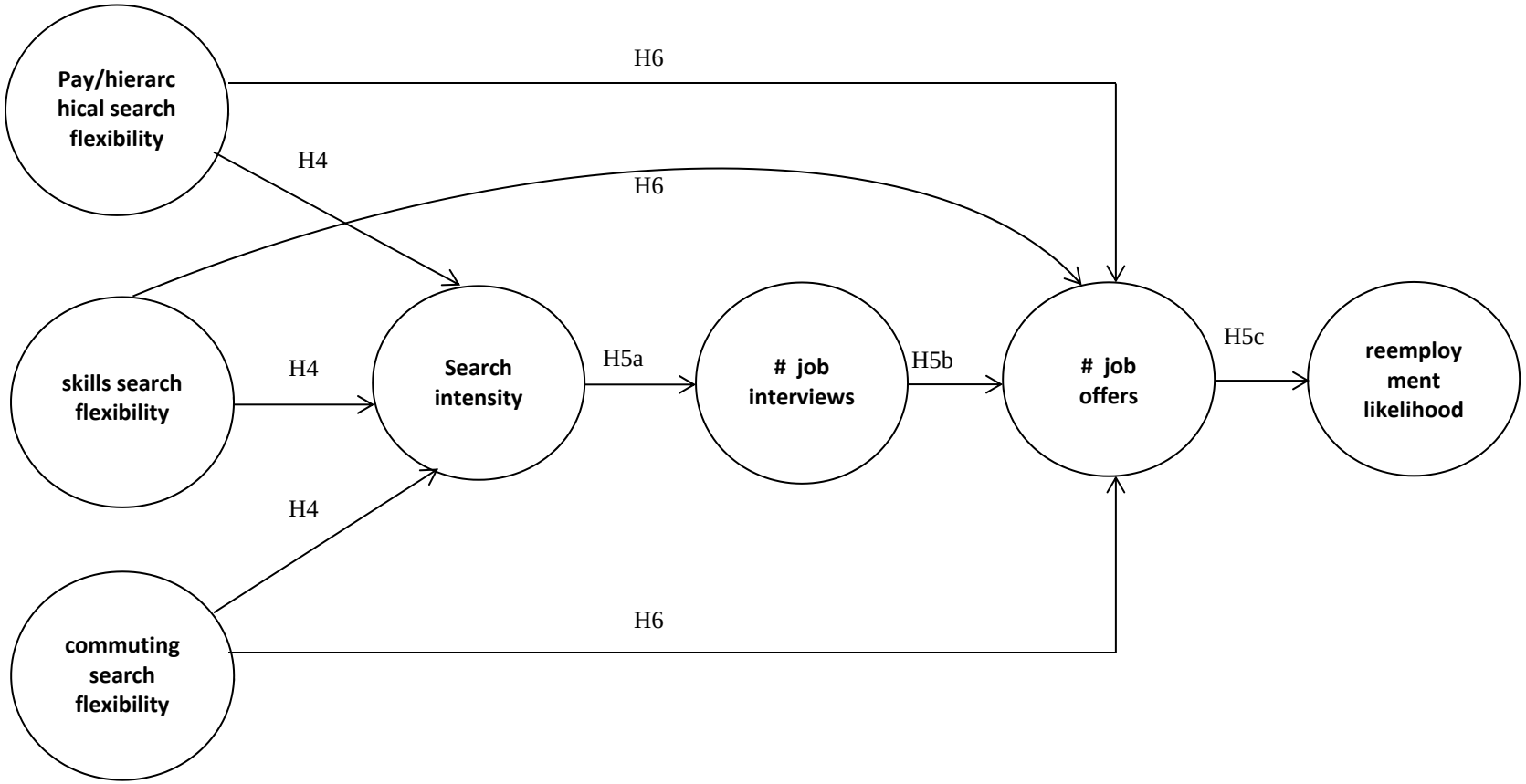
background. In addition, individuals with clearer career goals often have a more progressive career plan in mind for themselves. Hence, taking a step back in terms of wage, commuting time,… may often not be part of that plan. As such career planning may be negatively linked to FJSB.

Hypothesis 3b. Career planning is negatively related to each dimension of flexible job search behavior.

Impact of flexible job search behavior on reemployment

The second aim of this study is to examine the relationship between FJSB and established job search success outcomes. Vansteenkiste et al. (2013) investigated whether a flexible attitude during unemployment constrained or stimulated one's job search success. They found that unemployed jobseekers who adopt a flexible attitude receive in total *less* job offers, since they bump more into employers who believe they lack the relevant experience or educational background, or because they feel too insecure during the selection process. However, their study makes no distinction between different types of flexible job search. In this study, we reexamine their model and investigate whether our proposed types of FJSB can be related to job search outcomes in a same way. One of the downsides of Vansteenkiste et al.'s study is that it is cross-sectional and, does not look at the actual reemployment likelihood of unemployed jobseekers. We are able to address this obstacle by using a longitudinal design and including the likelihood of reemployment as indicator of job search success. In line with Vansteenkiste and colleagues, we assume that search flexibility may have both a positive and a negative impact on individuals' job search success (see Figure 6). We elaborate both paths in the next paragraphs.

Figure 6. Hypothesized model between flexible search behavior, search intensity and job search success.



A positive path

First of all, FJSB may increase the number of job offers an unemployed individual receives through job search intensity and the number of job interviews received. Job search intensity refers to the frequency with which job seekers, during a set period of time, engage in specific job search activities, like visiting job websites, discussing job leads with friends and sending out resumés to prospective employers (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2006). Individuals who search in a flexible way in terms of pay/job level, skills or commuting time are less strict in their demand of a future job and take into account both jobs that are in line with as well as jobs that deviate from their previous job or studies on these respective aspects. Hence, they are likely to put in more time and effort to map all the different jobs they consider and use more diverse job search channels. For instance, being flexible with respect to commuting time implies also looking for jobs in a wider area. To identify these jobs therefore, additional search channels and effort may be needed, like using contacts all over the country, also looking at national newspapers or using broader search terms at job websites which may give more hits and therefore need more time to cover. Tapping more search channels and spending more time using them, both lead to a higher job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001). As such, we assume that each of the three forms of job search flexibility will be positively related to job search intensity.

Hypothesis 4. Flexible job search behavior is positively related to job search intensity.

Job seekers who spend more time searching for a job are in general more aware of potential job openings and hence, are likely to apply more frequently for a job. As such, they may become more familiar with the application process and better able to tune their applications to the specific needs of employers. This may increase the number of invitations they get for a job interview, which in turn can improve their chances to get a real job offer. Former studies indeed

confirm that job search intensity enhances the number of job interviews (Bradley & Taylor, 1992; Coté et al., 2006; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashfort, 2000), which has been found to positively impact the number of job offers (Coté et al., 2006; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000) and the likelihood of reemployment (Coté et al. 2006).

Hypothesis 5a. Job search intensity is positively related to the number of job interviews.

Hypothesis 5b. The number of job interviews is positively related to the number of job offers.

Hypothesis 5c. The number of job offers is positively related to the likelihood of job reemployment.

A negative path

Next to this positive path, we believe that there can also be a negative effect of FJSB on the number of job offers. Recent research demonstrates that unemployed individuals who adopt a flexible attitude (i.e., are "psychologically mobile") experience more barriers to getting a job offer, like employers who want more job related experience or the feeling of insecurity during job interviews (Vansteenkiste et al., 2013). Employers generally look for employees who fit well with the organisation and the vacant job and who have the right experience and aspirations (Bretz, Rynes & Gerhart, 1993; Judge & Ferris, 1992), whereas flexible applicants may be considered as an inferior match to the organisation since they may lack the required skills or motivation. In addition, employers may believe that employees who are flexible in terms of pay/hierarchy, skills or commuting time, have not carefully pondered over their decision, and as such may regret or become dissatisfied with their decision in time (Aldag & Power, 1986; Timmermans & Vlek, 1994). Therefore, they may be reluctant in hiring them, believing that they

have a higher likelihood of leaving the organization on their own initiative in the near future. As a result, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 6. Flexible job search behavior relates negatively to the number of job offers.

Method

Procedures and Participants

The data were collected with a random sample of 6000 Flemish unemployed job seekers. We targeted *short-term* unemployed individuals who had a paid job before they became unemployed. In Flanders, the first 6 months of unemployment, unemployed jobseekers may – without financial penalty – refuse jobs which are not in line with their own preferences. Afterwards, however, unemployed individuals risk losing (part of) their unemployment benefits if they not search for or if they refuse to accept jobs which are deemed "fitting" according to the criteria defined in the 'Law of Suitable Employment' (Wet van de Passende Dienstbetrekking). In this law, jobs are regarded as suitable even if they are in a different profession than the one in which one used to work, if they are not in line with one's educational background, if they demand a commuting time of up to 4 hours a day and if they pay at least as much as the unemployment benefit. In some circumstances, the protection period of six months can be shortened if deemed sensible by the public employment agency (e.g., when the person's education or previous work experience can objectively be regarded as offering poor chances of reintegration into the labor market). In practice however, this has hardly ever been done up to now. Since we try to measure the effect of a flexible search when it is performed in a rather 'voluntary' way, the individuals in our sample were at most 4 months unemployed when they participated in the study and therefore protected from public employment agency interventions.

Contact information of the 6000 unemployed individuals was provided by the Flemish public employment agency (VDAB). Participants had the opportunity to answer the questionnaire online or on paper. The questionnaire was conducted in October 2011 and reached 1743 respondents (RR_{T1}= 29%). After removing the respondents who were not actively looking for a new job (N=412), we remained with a sample of 1331 respondents. The average age of these respondents was 38 years (sd 10.71); 58% of them were female and 31% were lower educated (i.e. at most second stage of secondary education). Respondents had on average been unemployed for 2 months (sd 1.50). We use this sample to test the hypotheses of the antecedents of FJSB.

Three months after the first data collection, we sent the respondents a new questionnaire which they could answer online or on paper. The questionnaires of this second wave were answered by 1159 respondents, which is a response of 66%. After removing the respondents who were not actively looking for a new job and the incomplete records on any of the variables under study, we remained with a sample of 672 respondents. The average age of these respondents was 39 years (sd 10.39); 56% of them were female and 26% were lower educated (i.e., at most second stage of secondary education). Respondents had on average been unemployed for 2 months (sd 1.52) at the first measurement moment. We use this two-wave sample to test the hypotheses on the impact of FJSB on reemployment.

We performed a drop-out analysis by using a multiple logistic regression where the dependent variable was a dummy indicating whether one responded or not at T2. The explanatory variables – all measured at T1 – were age, gender, ethnic origin, education, unemployment duration, flexible job search behavior with respect to pay/hierarchy, skill usage and commuting time, subjective norms, financial hardship, reemployment efficacy, employment

commitment, career planning, career adaptability and job search intensity. We found that respondents at T2 were older, had more financial hardship and searched more intensified than the non-respondents. Hence, we can conclude from this drop-out analysis that the attrition is not fully random, however, we found no differences in FJSB between respondents and non-respondents, which is the core variable of this study.

Measures

Flexible job search behavior. We generated an initial set of items to measure FJSB based on OECD policymakers' flexibility requirements regarding unemployed individuals (Ministry of Finance, 1998; Hasselpflug, 2005; Venn, 2012) and inspired by existing flexibility and underemployment scales (e.g., Van den Broeck et al., 2010). As policymakers mainly define FJSB from unemployed individuals in terms of content, pay/job level, and commuting time, we distinguished these dimensions in our initial set of items. Scholars at the EGOS Colloquium of 2011 in Gothenborg provided their input on a first version of the scale. Items were further refined in response to the comments we received at this conference. This refined version was discussed with several experts (e.g., people from the Flemish unemployment agency VDAB) and scholars in the field. Finally, the face validity of the scale was tested by trying out and discussing the multidimensional scale with a number of unemployed individuals. In total, we retained nine items that measure the three proposed dimensions of flexible job search behavior. First, *pay/hierarchical* search flexibility consists of five items measuring the extent to which respondents (also) search for jobs that pay less or are at a lower hierarchical level compared with their previous jobs or educational levels. An example includes: "I (also) search for jobs which pay less than my previous job." Second, search flexibility regarding *skills* comprises three items measuring the degree to which respondents (also) respond to jobs that are not in line with their

previous jobs or studies. For example, “I (also) search for jobs of which the content differs strongly from that of my previous job.” Third, *commuting* search flexibility is a one-item measure that assesses the degree to which respondents (also) search for jobs that have longer commuting times between home and work than their previous jobs. Most studies that have examined commuting measure it as a one-item construct and focus merely on the commuting time or distance between home and work (e.g., Chapple, 2001; Clark, Huang & Withers, 2003; Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau & van Ommeren, 2010; Rouwendal, 2004; van Ommeren, Rietveld & Nijkamp, 1997, 1999). In line with these studies, we also included a one-item measure for commuting search flexibility. Participants indicated their response on all nine items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (definitely).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation on all nine items supported the three factors as explained above. The reliability of the pay/hierarchical and skill search flexibility scales was $\alpha = 0.81$ for both measurements. We also examined the discriminant validity of this measure by exploring whether our FJSB measure assessed something different than two other job search behaviors, i.e. job search intensity (measured with the scale of Blau, 1994 – see further) and job search strategy (measured with the scale of Crossly & Highhouse, 2005). The job search strategy scale measures three types of search strategies, i.e. the haphazard strategy (i.e., not having a concrete plan when looking for a job), exploratory strategy (i.e., having several job options in mind and trying to gather as much information as possible of these different options from various sources) and the focused search strategy (i.e., having a limited number of job options in mind and guiding search efforts towards screening a limited number of vacancies and employers). To test the discriminant analyses of our measure, we performed a CFA on the 9 items representing the three dimensions of FJSB, together with the 10 items representing job

search intensity and the 15 items representing the three different types of job search strategies. This model shows an acceptable fit: $\chi^2[423]=1530$, $p<.01$; SRMR=0.06; RMSEA=0.05; CFI=0.91. Moreover, each of the items loaded significantly to its corresponding factor.

Subjective norms. Subjective norms were assessed at T1 by the two-items scale of Vinokur & Caplan (1987), which has been used extensively in previous research (e.g., Wanberg et al., 2005; Zikic & Saks, 2009). A sample item is "Think about the person closest to you, such as a spouse, family member or good friend. How hard does this person think you should try to find a job in the next three months?". Answers were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (not hard at all) to 4 (extremely hard). Reliability of this scale was 0.85.

Financial hardship. Financial hardship was measured at T1 using the three-items scale of Vinokur and Caplan (1987), and Vinokur and Schul (1997) (e.g., "How difficult is it for you to live on your total household income right now?"). Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all difficult; 5 = extremely difficult). The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.89.

Reemployment efficacy. Consistent with Wanberg et al. (2010), we assessed reemployment efficacy at T1 using five items (e.g., "How easy or difficult do you expect it to be to find another job?"). Responses ranged from 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy). The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.85.

Employment commitment. We assessed employment commitment at T1 using the eight-items scale developed by Rowley & Feather (1987). A sample item is "Even if I won a great deal of money in the lottery, I would want to continue working somewhere". Responses could be rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of this scale was 0.85.

Career planning. Career planning was measured at T1 using the six-items scale of Gould (1979), which has been used extensively in previous research (Abele & Wiese, 2008; Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). A sample item is "I have a plan to obtain my career objectives". Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability of this scale was 0.85.

Career adaptability. Career adaptability was assessed at T1 by using the 5-item scale of London (1993). A sample item is "To which extent are you able to adapt to changes in your career". Respondents indicated their response on a 5-point scale (1= totally not; 5 = totally). The cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.79.

Job search intensity. Job search intensity was measured at T1 by the 9-item scale of Blau (1994), which has been extensively used in previous research (Zikic & Saks, 2009; Sverko, Galic, Sersic & Galesic, 2008; Coté et al., 2006; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van Der Flier & Blonk, 2004; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Wanberg et al., 1999 amongst others). Participants indicated how frequently they used certain search sources or performed a variety of search behaviors during the last 3 months. Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 0 times; 5 = very often, at least 10 times). Sample items are e.g. "Reading job advertisements in the paper", "Contacting employment agencies", "Visiting job websites", "Discussing job leads with friends or relatives". The reliability of this scale was $\alpha = 0.82$.

Job search success. Job search success was measured at T2 using three indicators, namely the number of job interviews received in the last three months, the number of job offers received in the last three months and a dummy variable indicating whether jobseekers found reemployment or not. All three measures have been extensively used in previous research as indicators of job search success (e.g. Koen et al. 2010; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000).

Controls. We used age, gender, ethnic origin, education and unemployment duration as control variables in the regressions on the antecedents of FJSB. Additionally, we took up needs-supply fit, wage and commuting time in the previous job as a control.

Age, gender, family status, fired in previous job or not, ethnic origin, education, unemployment duration, financial hardship, job search self-efficacy, reemployment efficacy, needs-supply fit in previous job, wage level in previous job and commuting time in previous job were used as control variables in the regressions on job search success, since they are regularly controlled for and/or have proven to significantly affect job search variables in previous research (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005; Sverko et al., 2008; Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

Results

Descriptive statistics

In table 5 and 6, we present the descriptive statistics and correlations of the different variables under study. Table 5 shows that the unemployed search on average most flexibly with respect to their skills (M=3.08, SD=1.05), followed by flexibility with respect to pay/hierarchy (M=2.31, SD=.82) and flexibility with respect to commuting time (M=2.27, SD=1.11). There are moderate positive correlations between the different types of flexibility ($r_{pay/hierarchy\ and\ skills}$=.27; $r_{pay/hierarchy\ and\ commuting}$=..30; $r_{skills\ and\ commuting}$=.19). Next, we found that financial hardship is significantly and positively correlated with skills search flexibility (r=.08, p<.01) but not with the other two types of FJSB; and subjective norms and employment commitment are only significantly and positively related to commuting search flexibility ($r_{subjective\ norms}$=.13, p<.01; $r_{employment\ commitment}$=.15, p<.01). Reemployment efficacy and career planning are negatively correlated with pay/hierarchical flexibility ($r_{reemployment\ efficacy}$=-.11, p<.01; $r_{career\ planning}$=-.17, p<.01) and skills search flexibility ($r_{reemployment\ efficacy}$=-.11, p<.01; $r_{career\ planning}$=-.13, p<.01), but

not to commuting search flexibility. Finally, we found a positive relationship between career adaptability and respectively skills search flexibility (r=.12, p<.01) and commuting search flexibility (r=.14, p<.01).

Table 5. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between FJSB and predictors.

	Mean (sd)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. pay/hierarchical search flexibility	2.31 (.82)								
2. skills search flexibility	3.08 (1.05)	.27**							
3. commuting search flexibility	2.27 (1.11)	.30**	.19**						
4. financial hardship	2.94 (1.05)	-.02	.08**	-.03					
5. subjective norms	2.85 (.84)	.02	.04	.13**	.12**				
6. employment commitment	3.50 (.79)	-.01	-.01	.15**	.26**	.30**			
7. reemployment efficacy	2.33 (.72)	-.11**	-.11**	.01	-.20**	-.02	-.07*		
8. career adaptability	3.54 (.65)	.04	.12**	.14**	.02	.07*	.14**	.06*	
9. career planning	3.32 (.80)	-.17**	-.13**	-.03	-.02	.03	.16**	.25**	.22**

Note: ** p<0.01; * p<0.05

Table 6 shows that there is a positive correlation between each dimension of FJSB and job search intensity. That is, there is a positive correlation between job search intensity and respectively pay/hierarchical search flexibility (r=.11, p<.01), skills search flexibility (r=.15, p<.01) and commuting search flexibility (r=.10, p<.05). Moreover, commuting search flexibility is positively related to the number of job interviews (r=.10, p<.01), whereas pay/hierarchical and skills search flexibility were negatively related to the number of job offers (respectively r=-.08, p<.05 and r=-.10, p<.05). None of the three types of FJSB was significantly related to reemployment.

Finally, we can establish a positive correlation between job search intensity and the number of job interviews (r=.29, p<.01). In turn, the number of job interviews is positively correlated with the number of job offers (r=.28, p<.01) and reemployment (r=.19, p<.01). Finally, the number of job offers also has a positive correlation with reemployment (r=.40, p<.01).

Table 6. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between FJSB, job search intensity and search success (n=672).

	Mean (sd)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. pay/hierarchical search flexibility	2.31 (.82)						
2. skills search flexibility	3.07 (1.02)	.27**					
3. commuting search flexibility	2.31 (1.10)	.26**	.19**				
4. search intensity	3.37 (.73)	.11**	.15**	.10*			
5. jobinterviews	2.93 (4.18)	.04	.06	.10**	.29**		
6. job offers	1.01 (1.59)	-.08*	-.10*	-.06	.05	.28**	
7. reemployment likelihood	.35 (.48)	-.06	.00	.03	.06	.19**	.40**

Note: ** p<0.01; * p<0.05

Antecedents of FJSB

We tested hypotheses 1 to 3 using hierarchical linear regressions, presented in table 7. In the first step, we took up the control variables age, gender, origin, educational level and unemployment duration. We also included respectively wage in the previous job, needs-supply fit in the previous job and commuting time in the previous job in the regressions on pay/hierarchical, skills and commuting time search flexibility. In the second step, we included the 6 antecedents. We base the discussions of the hypotheses on the second step of the hierarchical regressions.

Hypothesis 1a proposed that financial hardship would be positively related to pay/hierarchical and skills search flexibility, and negatively to commuting flexibility. We only found support for the negative relationship between financial hardship and commuting job search flexibility (β =-0.08; p<0.01); no significant impact with the other two types of FJSB was found. We therefore find only partial support for this hypothesis. In line with hypothesis 1b, we found subjective norms to be positively related with commuting search flexibility (β =0.06; p<0.10); however, no significant relationship was found with pay/hierarchical or skills search flexibility. Therefore, also hypothesis 1b can only be partly supported.

Table 7. Results of the regression analysis of the antecedents of FJSB (Standardized coefficients).

	Pay/hierarchical search flexibility (N=947)[1]		Skills search flexibility (N=1065)[1]		Commuting search flexibility (N=997)[1]	
	Step 1	**Step 2**	**Step 1**	**Step 2**	**Step 1**	**Step 2**
age	.07*	.05	-.09**	-.10**	-.07*	-.06^{+}
female	-.09**	-.09**	-.02	-.02	-.14**	-.13**
origin	-.03	-.02	-.05	-.04	-.02	-.01
low education	.01	.01	.00	-.00	-.06*	-.05
unemployment duration	.10**	.09**	-.00	-.01	.06*	.07*
wage previous job (log)	.07*	.09*				
ns fit previous job			-.21**	-.20**		
commuting time previous job					-.23**	-.24**
financial hardship		-.02		.05		-.08**
subjective norms		-.01		.01		.06^{+}
employment commitment		.00		-.02		.14**
reemployment efficacy		-.09*		-.08*		-.04
career adaptability		.05		.17**		.16**
career planning		-.14**		-.13**		-.04
Δ R^2		.03**		.05**		.06**
R^2	.04**	.07**	.06**	.11**	.08**	.14**

Note: [1] Respondents with incomplete records on any of the variables under study were excluded from the regression.
** p<0.01; * p<0.05; $^{+}$ p<0.10

In hypothesis 2a, we assumed that employment commitment and each dimension of FJSB would be positively related. However, this is only the case for commuting search flexibility (β=0.14; p<0.01). We find support for hypothesis 2b for two out of the three FJSB dimensions: reemployment efficacy is negatively related to respectively pay/hierarchical search flexibility (β =-0.09; p<0.05) and skills search flexibility (β =-0.08; p<0.05).

Hypothesis 3a is also only partly supported, as we can only establish a significant positive relationship between career adaptability and respectively skills search flexibility (β=0.17; p<0.01) and commuting search flexibility (β=0.16; p<0.01). No significant relationship is found with pay/hierarchical search flexibility. Hypothesis 3b, which assumed a negative

relationship between career planning and each of the FJSB dimensions, is only supported for pay/hierarchical search flexibility (β=-0.14; p<0.01) and skills search flexibility (β=-0.13; p<0.01), but not for commuting search flexibility.

Outcomes of FJSB

We used hierarchical linear and logistic regression analysis to test the hypotheses of the second part of this study. The results of the different steps in the hierarchical regression analyses can be found in tables 8 and 9. Figure 7 gives an overview of the main findings with respect to the proposed research model. We base the discussion of the results on the coefficients of the last step of every hierarchical or logistic regression, where all the variables of interest were included in the model.

Hypothesis 4 expected a positive relationship between each form of job search flexibility and job search intensity. We found support for this hypothesis for only two of the three types of FJSB. That is, only skills search flexibility (β=0.13, p<0.01) and commuting search flexibility (β=0.07, p<0.10) are positively related to job search intensity.

Furthermore, in line with hypothesis 5a to 5b, we find that a more intensified job search leads to a higher number of job interviews three months later (β=0.27, p<0.01), which in turn has a positive effect on the number of job offers (β=0.26, p<0.01). In addition, we find a marginally significant positive relationship between commuting search flexibility and the number of job interviews (β=0.07, p<0.10), which was not hypothesized. The results of table 9 further demonstrate that the number of job offers has a positive impact on reemployment (Exp(β)=2.27, p<0.01), which is in line with what we put forward in hypothesis 5c.

Table 8. Results of the regression analysis on the outcomes of FJSB (Standardized coefficients).

	search intensity		number of job interviews			number of job offers			
	Step 1	**Step 2**	**Step 1**	**Step 2**	**Step 3**	**Step 1**	**Step 2**	**Step 3**	**Step 4**
age	-.13**	-.11**	-.14**	-.12**	-.09*	-.11**	-.13**	-.12**	-.09**
female	.04	.06	-.14**	-.13**	-.14**	-.03	-.05	-.05	-.02
origin	.03	.04	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.06	-.05
low education	.02	.02	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.02	-.03	-.03	-.01
unemployment duration	.09*	.09*	-.05	-.05	-.07^{+}	-.15**	-.15**	-.16**	-.14**
fired	.07^{+}	.07^{+}	.10**	.10**	.08*	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.07^{+}
partner	.07^{+}	.07^{+}	.06	.06	.04	.03	.02	.02	.01
financial hardship	.12**	.11**	.08*	.08*	.06	.01	.02	.00	-.01
job search self-efficacy	.07^{+}	.08*	-.03	-.03	-.05	-.01	-.01	-.02	-.01
reemployment efficacy	-.09*	-.07^{+}	.02	.03	.05	.12**	.11**	.11**	.10**
previous wage (log)	.18**	.17**	.14**	.13**	.09*	.05	.06	.04	.02
previous commuting time	.01	.03	.09*	.11**	.11**	.02	.00	-.00	-.03
fit previous job	-.01	.02	.06	.07^{+}	.07^{+}	.08*	.07^{+}	.07^{+}	.05
pay/hierarchical search flexibility		.03		-.02	-.03		-.02	-.02	-.01
skills search flexibility		.13**		.06	.03		-.07^{+}	-.09*	-.09*
commuting search flexibility		.07^{+}		.09*	.07^{+}		-.06	-.07	-.08*
search intensity					.27**			.10*	.03
jobinterviews									.26**
job offers									
Δ R²		.03**		.01^{+}	.06**		.01^{+}	.01*	.06**
R²	.08**	.10**	.09**	.10**	.16**	.08**	.09**	.10**	.16**

Note: ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; $^{+}$ p<0.10

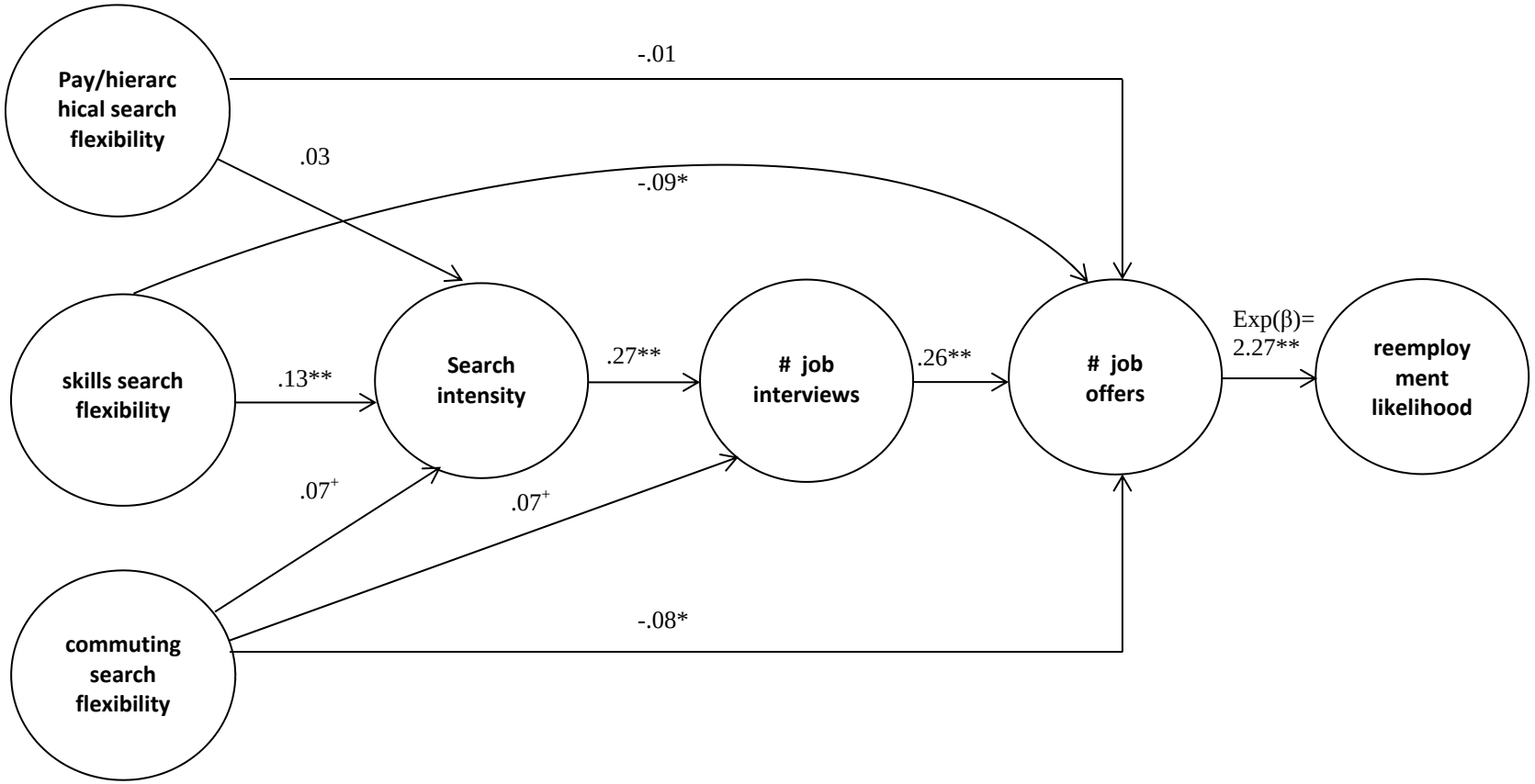
Next to this positive path, the results also partly support the proposed negative impact of FJSB on the number of job offers (hypothesis 6). Skills search flexibility (β=-0.09, p<.05) and commuting search flexibility (β=-0.08, p<.05) are both negatively related to the number of job offers as suggested in hypothesis 3. However, we do not find any significant relationship between pay/hierarchical search flexibility and the number of job offers. As such, we find only partial support for hypothesis 6.

Table 9. Results of the logistic regression analysis (Standardized coefficients).

	reemployment likelihood				
	Step 1	**Step 2**	**Step 3**	**Step 4**	**Step 5**
age	.96**	.96**	.96**	.97**	.97**
female	1.06	1.07	1.05	1.16	1.17
origin	.49*	.49*	.47*	.50^{+}	.60
low education	.89	.89	.88	.93	.95
unemployment duration	.82**	.82**	.81**	.82**	.87*
fired	.99	.98	.96	.90	1.04
partner	1.18	1.19	1.16	1.12	1.12
financial hardship	.83*	.83*	.81*	.79*	.75**
job search self-efficacy	1.31	1.32	1.27	1.34	1.31
reemployment efficacy	1.22	1.21	1.24	1.21	1.10
previous wage (log)	1.38	1.37	1.23	1.07	.93
previous commuting time	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
fit previous job	1.03	1.03	1.03	1.00	.98
pay/hierarchical search flexibility		.92	.91	.92	.95
skills search flexibility		1.02	1.00	.98	1.08
commuting search flexibility		1.07	1.05	1.03	1.09
search intensity			1.29*	1.13	1.07
jobinterviews				1.09**	1.03
job offers					2.27**
Cox & Snell R^2	.08**	.09**	.09**	.11**	.23**
Nagelkerke R^2	.12**	.12**	.13**	.15**	.31**

Note: ** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.05$; $^{+}$ $p<0.10$

Figure 7. Standardized regression coefficients of the relationship between FJSB, search intensity and job search success (n=672)



Note: ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; + p<0.10

Discussion

In this study, we examined antecedents and outcomes of FJSB. Inspired by policy research and the literature on job design, job fit, underemployment and willingness to sacrifice, we distinguished three flexibility dimensions: pay/job level, skills and commuting search flexibility. First, we tested the relationship between these three types of FJSB and job search antecedents. The results showed that even though the three forms of FJSB are moderately correlated, they are sometimes influenced by other aspects, which supports distinguishing multiple forms of FJSB.

As a general result regarding the antecedents of FJSB, we found that searching flexibly with respect to pay/hierarchy and skills arises to a greater extent due to more negative reasons, such as not knowing how to proceed in the career or seeing few labor market perspectives. Commuting flexibility on the other hand, can to a greater extent be linked to more positive drivers, like feeling committed to work or having an adaptable career attitude.

If we analyze the specific results of the relationship between the antecedents and each type of FJSB, we first of all establish that there is no significant link between the situational variables and searching flexibly with respect to pay/hierarchy. That is, those experiencing more financial or social pressure to find work do not search more often for jobs which pay less than the previous job/are below its job level. In Belgium, replacement incomes when unemployed are relatively generous, which could hold people feeling financial or social pressure back from lowering their job standards in the beginning of the unemployment period. Secondly, we found mixed support for the link between the four individual difference variables and pay/job level flexibility. Unemployed feeling more committed to work do not search more flexibly on this respect, whereas unemployed who see less labor market opportunities for themselves are inclined

to search more flexibly on pay/hierarchy and thus may feel like having to make more sacrifices in order to have any chance on a job. The fact that they see their labor market situation more negative could imply a number of things. It could be that these individuals are just more pessimistic in nature and therefore think more negative about their chances even if there is no immediate reason to do so. However, it could also be that these individuals have correct perceptions, in which case it could be that flexible individuals are those who hold a weaker position on the labor market and have more difficulties in finding a job. Still, we did not find that those demonstrating more flexibility are the less educated (there was no significant effect of educational level on flexibility). Next, unemployed individuals with more fuzzy career goals (i.e., who have less career planning) also search more flexibly on pay/hierarchy. Hence, those who do not really know which direction to go with the career are more flexible on their pay/hierarchical level.

When we looked at the antecedents of searching for jobs in other job domains (i.e. being flexible with respect to skills), we found similar relationships as those with searching flexibly with respect to pay/hierarchy. Unemployed individuals who have less of a career plan in mind and see few labor market opportunities for oneself also search more flexibly regarding their skills. Therefore, unemployed wanting to reorient themselves, do not seem to do this as part of a well worked-out strategy for their future career, but rather because they believe not having much prospects on the labor market. As opposed to flexibility with respect to pay/hierarchy, we did find that those who are career adaptable search more often for jobs with a different job content. Being better able to deal with changing career circumstances is seen as something positive which could help people to make progress in their career (e.g., Koen et al., 2010). Still, unemployed flexible on their skills do not seem to succeed in successfully convincing employers that they are

a good match, since we established that these individuals receive less job offers. This may be partly explained by their lack of career focus when they present themselves at potential employers. Therefore, it seems that in particular these individuals could gain from extra career guidance by counselors, so that their flexibility or will to reorient comes across more as a well-considered career step.

We found several different results when we studied the antecedents of searching for a job that demands more commuting time. The situational variables had the expected relationship with this type of flexibility: unemployed individuals experiencing more financial pressure are *less* flexible on their commuting time whereas those who feel more social pressure are *more* flexible on this respect. We also found support for part of the assumed relationships with the individual difference variables. Being more committed to work and being more adaptable in the career makes unemployed search for jobs in wider geographical areas. However, we could not establish the expected relationships with reemployment efficacy or career planning. As such, commuting flexibility seems to arise to a greater extent due to positive reasons (feeling committed to work, having an adaptable career attitude) and to a lesser extent due to negative reasons (such as not knowing how to proceed in the career or seeing few labor market perspectives) compared to the other two types of flexible job search behavior.

Next, we investigated whether FJSB leads to reemployment success. To this end, we re-examined and adapted the model of Vansteenkiste et al. (2013). The results of the regression analyses indicated that unemployed individuals who search in a flexible way with respect to their skills and commuting time, search more intensely and as a result receive more invitations to the selection process. The latter was found to increase the number of job offers and to lead to a greater likelihood of reemployment. However, for both flexibility types, there is also an opposing

force at work which negatively impacts the number of job offers and hence, offsets the increased likelihood of reemployment, so that in the end, searching in a flexible way with respect to skills and commuting time may not increase the chances of finding a new job – at least in the beginning of the unemployment period. The negative effect on the number of job offers may be due to employers who prefer applicants with "linear" career aspirations (cf. Cappelli, 2012). That is, they may prefer applicants who search for jobs that are in line with their previous employment experience and that do not demand extensive commuting. They may fear that hiring a highly flexible person in terms of skills and commuting time could jeopardize the person-environment fit. It is rather remarkable that individuals actively looking for jobs in other job domains and thus willing to reorient, are less often granted the opportunity to do so, especially in a context where a lot of employers complain of having difficulties to fill certain job vacancies (European Commission, 2012). Up to now, the responsibility for this problem has mainly been put on the mismatch between the skills education provides and the skills required by employers. Our results seem to indicate that this may be only part of the story. Cappelli (2012) dedicated a whole book on this subject and came to the conclusion that even when vacancies are difficult to fill, employers still make unrealistic and excessive demands as to working experience, previous job titles,… towards potential employees. The results of this study show indeed that even when people put in the effort of willing to reorient, they are not always rewarded, which seem to confirm that the current selection techniques may be part of the bottleneck problem.

Unlike expected, we did not find any impact of searching flexibly regarding the pay/job level on any job search success outcome. The finding that this type of flexibility is not negatively linked to the number of job offers, may be explained by the fact that jobseekers who apply for jobs that are below their previous wage or job level are more often overskilled for the job, which

may be less a problem from an employer point of view since overskilled employees need less investments of extra education or training. Anyway, we established that just like searching flexibly with respect to skills and commuting time, searching flexibly regarding one's pay/hierarchy does not positively affect the reemployment likelihood, which goes against the expectations of both policymakers and scholars. Hence, our results point to an important caveat that should be included in further thinking about flexibility during unemployment by both policymakers and scholars, at least in the beginning of the unemployment period.

Implications for theory

This study first of all adds important insights to the job search literature. Up to now, most studies examining job search behavior focused on job search intensity, i.e. the frequency with which job seekers, during a set period of time, perform certain job search activities, like visiting job websites, discussing job leads with friends, etc. (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005). Even though this type of job search behavior has proven to be an important predictor of reemployment outcomes (see Kanfer et al., 2001 and Saks, 2005 for an overview), it is presumed that this only forms the tip of the iceberg and that much can be gained from adopting a broader approach to job search behavior (Koen et al. 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). In particular, scholars have called to introduce and study new indicators of job search behavior (Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). By focussing on flexible job search behavior, we answered this call. Moreover, we demonstrated that it is useful to conceptualize this type of job search behavior as a multidimensional measure. Though the three forms of FJSB are related, they are not always influenced by the same antecedents or have the same effects on the job search outcomes.

This study also adds to the career literature. Our findings suggest that people do not solely determine their future career path. In the notion of protean careers, people are largely

deemed responsible for developing their own career (Hall, 2004; King, 2004). In this respect, it is often believed that people can take matters into their own hands and can control their future by just conducting the proper behaviors. As such, the emphasis is principally on agency-factors and less on structural factors (Forrier, Sels & Stynen, 2009). In this vein, flexibility is believed to be a suitable behavior as it may enable unemployed jobseekers to adjust better to their new context of unemployment and may let them find reemployment more easily. However, our results indicate that flexibility is not always rewarded in the job search process, suggesting that unemployed individuals are also subject to structural components, i.e., circumstances which they cannot control. Moreover, it also shows that searching flexibly is perhaps not always the best way to deal with a period of unemployment, even though it is believed to be one of the key behaviors in new career thinking (Hall, 2004; Koen et al., 2010; Mervish & Hall, 1994). Next, we also studied career variables (like career adaptability and career planning) in a job search context. Only recently scholars have started to link career attitudes to job search behaviors (e.g., Zikic & Saks, 2009; Koen et al., 2010). Future research could benefit from adopting a similar approach, as both our study and the one of Koen and colleagues (2010) shows that career variables are able to significantly predict job search behaviors.

Implications for policy and practice

We believe that the results of this study demonstrate that one should be cautious with promoting people to search flexibly and at least provide extra guidance to flexible jobseekers. In particular, there is an important role for counselors in helping unemployed jobseekers to find a new job. Firstly, it may be worthwhile to let job counselors advise jobseekers not to go for every possible job or not to burn energy on job opportunities which are likely to fail anyway (cf. Vansteenkiste et al. 2013). At least in the beginning of the unemployment period, our results

show that it may be more interesting to not search too widely with respect to skills and commuting time, but more or less in the direction of the previous job, since this is likely to be more valued by potential employers. Secondly, if one does broaden the search scope in terms of skills and commuting time, then it is important to offer adequate guidance so that these flexible jobseekers come across as confident and motivated, and are able to convince employers of their willingness to perform the job and to take away any possible concerns regarding their sustainable employability in the organisation.

Nevertheless, it is also important to notice that we focused on short-term unemployed in this study, so that the respondents that searched in a flexible way mainly did this on a 'voluntary' ground, i.e., without much pressure from the Flemish public employment agency. As such, we do not know the exact effects of a flexible search if this would be induced or enforced by a public employment agency. On the one hand, one could expect that if unemployed individuals are pressurized to be flexible, its negative impact on the number of job offers will be *more* pronounced. Jobseekers who are forced to be flexible may come across less convincing, motivated or confident in the selection process, which may make potential employers even more reluctant in hiring them. On the other hand, however, it is possible that the results of the current study are more negative on the number of job offers and reemployment likelihood, since those who are now voluntarily flexible could be more often those individuals who have a weaker job profile. If *everyone* is expected to be flexible on penalty of one's unemployment benefits, this selection-effect may be erased, making the negative link between flexible job search behavior and the number of job offers *less* pronounced.

Limitations and directions for future research

There are some limitations connected with this study, which could be addressed in future research. First, institutional factors could play an important role. For instance, in countries were the system of unemployment benefits is less generous (i.e. shorter duration and/or lower level of benefits), the pressure to accept just any kind of job may be bigger and hence the impact of flexible job search behavior may be different. It may therefore be interesting to go deeper into the influence of institutional systems on the impact of searching flexibly. Moreover, we studied respondents who were not pressurized by the public employment agency to search flexibly. Future research could scrutinize the impact of searching in a flexible way when this is forced upon by policy requirements.

Second, we focused on short-term unemployed persons. It is not clear what the impact of a flexible search will be when we look at persons who are unemployed for a longer period. It could therefore be very useful to repeat this research with a mixture of short-term and long-term unemployed individuals and to look in more detail at the impact of the unemployment duration on the outcomes presented in this study.

Third, this study was executed in Flanders, region of Belgium. It is not clear whether some of the found results are generalizable or rather country-specific. For instance, it may be interesting to explore whether the hesitance of employers to hire people with non-linear career paths also reoccurs in other countries.

Fourth, we only focused on three types of FJSB, inspired by existing policy regulations and several research streams. Future research could identify and study other types of flexibility, such as flexibility with respect to working hours, vacation time, work/non-work balance, etc.

Fifth, we looked at the impact of FJSB on one type of job search success outcome, namely the reemployment likelihood. We established that flexibility benefits nor harms unemployed individuals on this respect. Recently, scholars have begun to recognize that a successful job search does not simply imply finding just any job, but rather finding a *good* job that has the prospect of long-lasting employment (Koen et al., 2010; McKee-Ryan, Virick, Prussia, Harvey & Lilly, 2009). It may therefore be interesting for future research to also investigate the impact of flexible job search behavior on the quality of the newly found job. It could be that flexibility goes together with another important risk, namely the chance of ending up in job which is substandard given one's competencies and skills (cf. Van den Broeck et al., 2010). As such the quality of the newly found job may be more negative, leaving flexible individuals with the danger of ending up in a less sustainable career path.

Conclusion

In this study, we focused on flexible job search behavior among unemployed jobseekers. This type of behavior has been promoted and encouraged by both policymakers and scholars, but rarely been investigated up to now. As such, this study made an important contribution to the job search literature and to existing policy insights. This study has also some practical implications, since it demonstrates that people who search in a flexible way in terms of pay/hierarchy, skills and commuting time do not find reemployment with a greater likelihood. This finding goes against some of the prevailing assumptions made by policymakers and scholars. Hence, this study points out that flexible job search behavior among unemployed jobseekers does not achieve the anticipated results, indicating the necessity of rethinking policies aimed at promoting this type of behavior.

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CHAPTER 4.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FLEXIBLE JOB SEARCH BEHAVIOR: FROM UNEMPLOYMENT TO UNDEREMPLOYMENT?[3]

Abstract

Though unemployment frequently results in underemployment, few studies have combined insights from both job search and underemployment research. Drawing on both research fields, this study explores the relationship between job search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being. To date, most studies have found little explanatory power for models that examine this link (Koen et al., 2010). Using underemployment as a mediator, we found support for this relationship and gained more information on *how* search behavior influences work-related attitudes and well-being. Next, our results also give more insight into *how* people end up in underemployed jobs, which has rarely been investigated (Feldman, 1996; Maynard, 2011). To this end, we focused on flexibility as a job search behavior. Flexibility is considered one of the key behaviors in the job search process by both policymakers and scholars (see e.g., Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Venn, 2012). To perform our analyses, we drew on longitudinal data of 302 Flemish unemployed individuals, collected in 2011–2012. Our results demonstrated that there are downsides to searching flexibly during the job search process in terms of job quality.

Keywords: flexible job search behavior, work-related attitudes and well-being, underemployment, unemployment

[3] This article has been granted the best poster award at the Positive Occupational Health Psychology conference held on September 12th-13th 2013. It has also been awarded as The Arnon Reichers Best Student Paper Award Finalist at the Academy of Management Conference at Lake Buena Vista, Orlando (USA) held on August 9th-13th 2013.

Introduction

Unemployment is one of the most dramatic events people may encounter in their careers. Unemployed individuals are often confronted with financial difficulties, loss of status and recognition, and poor mental and physical health (e.g., Price, Friedland & Vinokur, 1998; Price, Choi & Vinokur, 2002). Because unemployment can have such detrimental consequences, unemployed individuals often try to escape this situation as quickly as possible and thus are sometimes inclined to look for and accept any possible job. Still, scholars more and more recognize that a successful job search does not simply imply finding just any job, but rather finding a *good* job that has the prospect of long-lasting employment (Koen et al., 2010; McKee-Ryan et al., 2009). Job search scholars are therefore increasingly examining the impact of job search behavior on work-related attitudes and well-being, like job satisfaction, person-job fit, work engagement, and turnover intentions. However, so far, the support for the link between job search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being has remained weak at best (Koen et al., 2010; Saks, 2005; Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Wanberg, Hough & Song, 2002).

Two main reasons have been put forward to explain this lack of support. First, studies examining the link between job search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being have approached job search behavior in a rather narrow way (Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). That is, scholars have mainly focused on *job search intensity* as a measurement of job search behavior, i.e., how often jobseekers perform certain search activities during a specific period of time (cf. Blau, 1994). Job search intensity has been found to be a good predictor of quantitative search outcomes, like the number of job offers and the likelihood of reemployment (e.g., Kanfer, Wanberg & Kantrowitz, 2001; Wanberg, Kanfer & Rotundo, 1999), but its predictive power for other search outcomes, like work-related attitudes and well-being, remains

low (Saks, 2005; Koen et al., 2010). Therefore, other determinants of job search behavior should be examined to explain more variance in work-related attitudes and well-being (Koen et al., 2010). Second, little attention has been paid to potential mediators of the link between search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being; or, as Saks and Ashforth (2002; p. 647) put it: scholars have failed "to consider both direct and indirect relationships."

In this study, we aim to address these gaps. In particular, we focus on one specific job search behavior, namely flexible job search behavior (De Coen, Forrier & Sels, 2011; Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Venn, 2012; Wanberg, Zhang & Diehn, 2010) and introduce underemployment as a mediator of the relationship between flexible job search and work-related attitudes and well-being. Flexible job search behavior (FJSB) refers to the extent to which unemployed individuals also respond to vacancies for jobs that differ from their previous jobs and/or educational background, for instance in terms of content, pay, job level, or commuting time (De Coen et al., 2012; Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Venn, 2012). The more unemployed jobseekers also search for jobs that are different content-wise, have a lower wage/hierarchical level, or demand more commuting time, the more flexible they are on the respective domain. We expect that jobseekers who engage in more flexible job searching, have a greater chance of ending up in underemployment—i.e., in a job that is substandard—and will therefore have more negative work-related attitudes and well-being. By focusing on FJSB and adding underemployment as a mediator, we believe we can find more support for the relationship between job search, and work-related attitudes and well-being.

In addition, we expect that this relationship may be affected by contingency factors, like the circumstances under which job search behavior leads to negative work-related attitudes and well-being. In this study, we test one such contingency factor, i.e., unemployment duration. In

particular, we expect unemployment duration to moderate the relationship between underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being. Since people's employability tends to decrease the longer they stay unemployed (Berntson, Sverke & Marklund, 2006), individuals who end up in substandard jobs after longer periods of unemployment may feel more trapped into their jobs, and as a result, may have more negative work-related attitudes and well-being (Gamboa et al., 2009; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2009). By investigating this potential moderation effect of unemployment duration, we try to take into account the broader context in which people end up in underemployment and try to improve scholars' understanding about the determinants of work-related attitudes and well-being.

This study makes several contributions. First, by focusing on FJSB and using both mediating (underemployment) and moderating (unemployment duration) variables, we try to find more explanatory power for the job search-work-related attitudes and well-being relationship. Second, by introducing FJSB as an antecedent of work-related attitudes and well-being, we apply a richer approach to examining job search behavior (Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002) and address the calls for more studies on the outcomes of job search behavior (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Third, by linking job search behavior to underemployment we shed light on *how* people end up underemployed. So far, most underemployment scholars have merely focused on the impact of being underemployed or on who becomes underemployed (see McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011 for an overview). Little is known about *how* people end up being underemployed (Feldman, 1996; Maynard, 2011).

Flexible Job Search Behavior (FJSB)

In recent years, flexible job search behavior (FJSB), i.e., the extent to which jobseekers also look for jobs that deviate from their earlier work experience and/or educational background

(Venn, 2012), has received increasing attention, both from policymakers and scholars (see, e.g., Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Venn, 2012). From a policy perspective, more FJSB among the unemployed population is related to higher labor market efficiency. First, policymakers believe that promoting this type of job search behavior may help to address the increased mismatch between labor demand and supply (Herremans et al., 2011). In recent years, countries across the world have been confronted with both a rising number of job openings and a rising, or at least stable, unemployment rate (Barlevy, 2011; Kosfeld, Dreger & Eckey, 2008; Herremans et al., 2011), a situation resulting from a mismatch between, on the one hand, the characteristics and requirements of the available jobs, and on the other hand, jobseekers' preferences and skills (Kosfeld et al., 2008). Stimulating unemployed individuals to broaden their job search and take into account job opportunities that deviate from their initial preferences would increase the labor supply for a given labor demand and is therefore expected to improve the matching process. Second, more FJSB is also believed to diminish the negative side effects of providing unemployment benefits, like longer periods of unemployment (see, e.g., OECD, 2006; Mortensen, 1977 & 1990; Venn, 2012). Although most countries want to offer income security to unemployed persons in the form of unemployment benefits, these unemployment benefits also lower the cost of being unemployed and therefore tend to reduce beneficiaries' search efforts and increase the wage level at which they are willing to work (i.e., their reservation wage). As a consequence, it often takes the unemployed longer to find work. Since FJSB may positively influence people's search efforts (Zikic & Saks, 2009) and implies lowered wages and other demands (Venn, 2012), promoting this type of behavior among unemployed individuals is expected to offset the negative consequences of providing benefits to unemployed jobseekers (Venn, 2012).

In addition to policymakers, scholars also attach importance to FJSB among unemployed jobseekers. First, unemployed individuals who engage in more flexible job searching are believed to increase their chances of being recruited. Since companies are increasingly working in a turbulent environment and are in need of human flexibility to address this context, they are believed to increasingly hire individuals who demonstrate flexibility (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Second, the importance attached to FJSB also reflects the importance that career scholars attach to flexibility—or what is often referred to as *adaptability*—as an important competency in today's career landscape. The prevailing notion in career research suggests that in the last decades, traditional, steady career paths guided by employers have increasingly been replaced by so-called "protean" and "boundaryless" careers, i.e., careers in which the onus rests on individuals themselves and where physical boundaries are blurred and can easily be crossed (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2004). In this new career vision, being able to adjust swiftly to different work and career circumstances—i.e., being adaptable—is deemed indispensable when one makes a transition (e.g., Hall, 2004; Koen et al., 2010; Mervish & Hall, 1994). Since unemployed jobseekers are on the eve of a transition, being adaptable is considered a necessary career skill for them (e.g., Koen et al., 2010).

Though both policymakers and scholars believe that FJSB is important for unemployed individuals and may help them to find reemployment, little attention has been given to the potential downsides of such flexibility. For instance, it may increase the likelihood of acquiring an inferior job, which may lead to more negative work-related attitudes and well-being – an assumption also made, though not investigated, by Van den Broeck et al. (2010). Since hardly any empirical studies have examined the impact of job search flexibility, nothing is known about

these potential adverse effects. With this study, we aim to address this gap by looking at the impact of FJSB on work-related attitudes and well-being.

A multidimensional construct

We use a multidimensional concept of FJSB that builds on OECD policymakers' flexibility demands regarding unemployed individuals and on the literature related to the job choice process—i.e., the job design, job fit, willingness to sacrifice, and underemployment literature—which maps the different job attributes jobseekers find important in their job search process, but upon which they are also willing to make concessions.

First, studies on the job search requirements in OECD countries (Hasselpflug, 2005; Ministry of Finance, 1998; Venn, 2012) suggest that policymakers expect FJSB from unemployed individuals in terms of *job content or skill usage*, i.e., an unemployed individual must also accept job offers in other occupational areas than his or her previous job or studies. Literature suggests that this is also one of the factors jobseekers take into account when deciding on a new job (Boswell et al., 2003; Chapman et al., 2005; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987; Turban, Eyring & Campion, 1993; Turban, 2001). Job fit theory (Edwards, 1991; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005) indicates that people evaluate the extent to which job demands coincide with their knowledge, skills, and abilities. However, unemployed individuals are not always in a position to look for jobs that fit best with their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Research suggests that in order to find reemployment, a large proportion of unemployed jobseekers (up to 50% and more) are willing to accept jobs that require retraining (e.g., Kloosterman, 1987; Kroft et al., 1989; Miltenburg & Woldringh, 1990; Van Wezel, 1972). Moreover, jobseekers often end up in jobs for which they are overskilled (e.g., Green & McIntosh, 2007; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). This type of FJSB thus corresponds with an

often distinguished dimension in underemployment research, namely skill underutilization (e.g., Feldman, 1996; Maynard, 2011; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

Second, OECD policymakers require, to some extent, that unemployed individuals search flexibly with respect to their *pay*, i.e., an unemployed individual must also accept a job that offers a lower wage than his or her previous job or than the usual wage for that occupation. The pay/hierarchical level has also proven to play an important role when deciding on a new job (e.g., Boswell et al., 2003; Osborn, 1990; Konrad et al., 2000). The amount unemployed jobseekers want to be paid in a future job varies widely, with some jobseekers willing to make concessions upon the wage of their previous job, whereas others not (Feldstein & Poterba, 1984; Jones, 1989; Hogan, 2004). Hogan (2004) indicated that around 60% of British jobseekers have a reservation wage that is less than their previous wage. Along the same lines, a group of Belgian/Dutch scholars, who between the 1970s and 1990s studied the sacrifices unemployed jobseekers are willing to make when offered jobs, also point out that the pay/hierarchical level is one of the main aspects unemployed individuals make concessions upon (e.g., Deleeck et al., 1988; Kloosterman, 1987; Kroft et al., 1989; Miltenburg & Woldringh, 1990; Van Wezel, 1972). This type of job search behavior also corresponds to one of the frequently studied dimensions of underemployment, namely pay/hierarchical underemployment (being underpaid or at a lower hierarchical level compared with the previous job/ educational level) (e.g., McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

Third, OECD policymakers have developed legislation regarding the *commuting time* of unemployed individuals and expect them to be flexible regarding this issue as well when searching for jobs. That is, unemployed individuals must also accept jobs that demand a certain, predetermined transportation time. Several studies from the 1970s through the 1990s

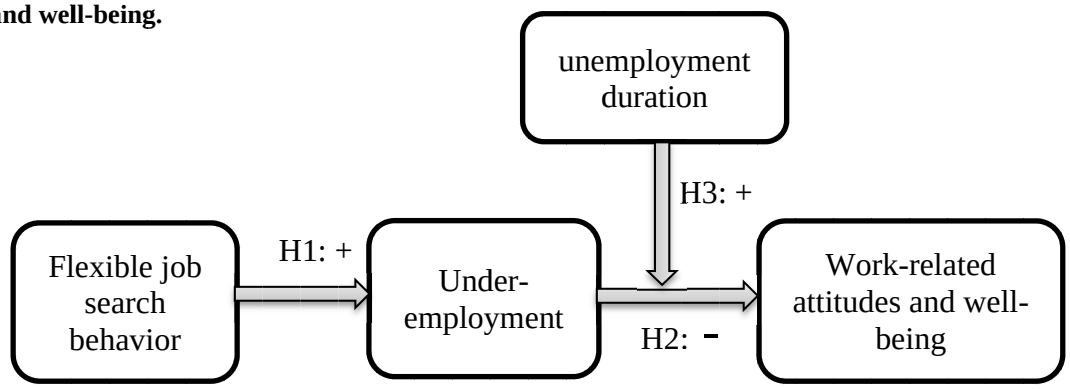
demonstrated that the majority of unemployed jobseekers (up to 54%) are willing to accept jobs for which they have to commute extensively (Deleeck et al., 1988; Kloosterman, 1987; Kroft et al., 1989; Miltenburg & Woldringh, 1990; Van Wezel, 1972). More recent research has also indicated that commuting time significantly influences jobseekers' decision to accept jobs (Boswell et al., 2003; Konrad et al., 2000; Turban, Forret & Hendrickson, 1998).

Hence, in our notion, FJSB refers to the extent to which jobseekers also apply for jobs that deviate in terms of content, pay/hierarchy, and commuting time from their past jobs and/or previous training.

FJSB, Underemployment, and Work-related Attitudes and Well-being

Despite the importance that policymakers and scholars attach to flexibility, this type of search behavior may also include certain risks, in particular the risk of ending up underemployed. We expect that more flexible job searching often results in people ending up in underemployed jobs, which, in turn, adversely influence their work-related attitudes and well-being (Figure 8). Next to this mediating effect of underemployment, we also expect unemployment duration to moderate the relationship between underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being. That is, we believe that people who become underemployed after relatively longer unemployment periods will have more negative work-related attitudes and well-being.

Figure 8. Hypothesized model between flexible search behavior, underemployment, and work-related attitudes and well-being.



Underemployment as a mediator between flexible job search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being

Since people's behaviors tend to affect their resulting situations (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), we expect FJSB to impact job seekers' subsequent level of underemployment. Individuals who search in a flexible manner during their job search process not only look for jobs in line with their previous jobs and/or educational background in terms of content, pay/hierarchy, or commuting time, but also for jobs that differ in terms of some of these aspects. As they more often participate in the application process for these jobs, it is likely that they will more often receive job offers with underemployment characteristics (Côté, Saks & Zikic, 2006; Crossly & Stanton, 2005; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000) and subsequently accept such jobs (e.g., Côté et al., 2006). Consequently, we expect jobseekers who search flexibly more often to end up being underemployed (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Moreover, as we distinguish between different types of FJSB, we expect each type to be linked with a different form of underemployment. If unemployed individuals are also looking for jobs that differ in terms of skill usage from their previous jobs or educational background, they may be more likely to end up in jobs that underutilize their skills. Likewise, people looking for jobs that differ in terms of pay/hierarchy or commuting time from their previous jobs or educational background are believed to more frequently end up in jobs that pay less or demand more commuting time. Hence, we state the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a. Skill search flexibility is positively related to skill underutilization.

Hypothesis 1b. Pay/hierarchical search flexibility is positively related to pay/hierarchical underemployment.

Hypothesis 1c. Commuting search flexibility is positively related to commuting underemployment.

Having a substandard job has frequently been demonstrated to lead to more negative work-related attitudes and well-being, in terms of, e.g., lower job satisfaction, higher turnover intentions, and lower levels of work engagement and person-job fit (Feldman, 1996; Feldman, Leana, & Bolino, 2002; Maynard, Joseph & Maynard, 2006; Burke, 1997; Brasher & Chen, 1999; McKee-Ryan et al., 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2000, among others). Relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976) is often drawn on to support the negative link between underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being (e.g., McKee-Ryan et al. 2009; Erdogan & Bauer, 2011; Feldman et al., 2002; Kraimer, Shaffer & Bolino, 2009). The theory states that individuals' attitudes are determined by the comparisons they make between their current and their former or optimal situations. In a working context, this means that individuals compare the features of their current jobs (e.g., wage, commuting time, content) to the features they feel entitled to given their background and the features of their former jobs (McKee-Ryan et al., 2009). If a discrepancy is observed, it gives rise to feelings of relative deprivation. If people experience working in substandard jobs, they are likely to feel entitled to better jobs and to feel relatively deprived. In response to these feelings, such deprived employees may not feel like a part of these organizations and may therefore experience a lower person-job fit. In addition, they may "psychologically distance" themselves from their jobs and the organizations they work for, which may decrease their level of job satisfaction and work engagement and increase their intention to leave these organizations (Feldman et al., 2002; McKee-Ryan et al., 2009). We assume, therefore, that underemployment leads to more negative work-related attitudes and well-

being, in terms of higher turnover intentions, lower job satisfaction, and lower levels of work engagement and person-job fit.

Hypothesis 2. Underemployment is negatively related to work-related attitudes and well-being. That is, underemployment leads to higher turnover intentions, lower job satisfaction, and lower levels of person-job fit and work engagement.

Unemployment duration as a moderator between underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being

To date, little is known about the conditions under which underemployment leads to assumed negative work-related attitudes and well-being, despite calls from several authors to research this issue (e.g., Feldman, 1996; Maynard, 2011). We believe that the strength of the relationship between underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being is influenced by individuals' unemployment duration.

A first reason we assume that unemployment duration acts as a moderator between underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being is related to its impact on individuals' perceived employability, i.e., the perception of their chances to achieve new jobs (Berntson et al., 2006). The longer jobseekers remain unemployed, the more difficult it becomes to maintain their existing transferable skills and the higher the risk that these skills may even decline due to a lack of use or technological change (cf. Becker, 1964, 1993; De Grip & Van Loo, 2002). This may in turn decrease their perceived employability (Berntson et al., 2006). Therefore, individuals who end up underemployed after longer periods of unemployment may feel more trapped into their jobs and may see no real possibilities to improve themselves in the near future. As a result, they may evaluate their current jobs more negatively (e.g., Gamboa et

al., 2009; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2009) and therefore have more negative work-related attitudes and well-being.

Second, jobseekers may end up underemployed after longer unemployment periods out of necessity or even a sense of desperation, which may influence their work-related attitudes and well-being. The longer people are unemployed, the more their levels of anxiety, stress, and financial strain increase (e.g., Jackson & Warr, 1984; Kinicki, Prussia & McKee-Ryan, 2000; McKee-Ryan, Wanberg & Kinicki, 2005; Warr & Jackson, 1984). Hence, individuals who are unemployed for relatively longer durations may feel pressured to make certain decisions in their job search process, both by internal and external factors. As a result, one's actual situation (underemployment) is more likely to be in contrast with his or her reference outcome (finding a good job), which may lead to feelings of regret and counterfactual thinking (e.g., "What if I would have further prolonged my search for a job?") (Reb & Connolly, 2010; Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2005). This has been shown to decrease well-being and satisfaction (Thompson, Armstrong & Thomas, 1998). Conversely, individuals who are unemployed for relatively shorter durations may more often end up underemployed because of a conscious and well-considered choice. It is probable that individuals who primarily attribute their underemployment to their own free choice may be better able to cope with this situation (cf. attribution theory; Kelly, 1973). These individuals may then better be able to mentally prepare themselves for the consequences of working in a state of underemployment and therefore have more positive work-related attitudes and well-being.

Based on the above arguments, we believe that individuals who are unemployed for longer durations will have more pronounced negative work-related attitudes and well-being than those unemployed for shorter periods of time. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. People who are unemployed for longer periods of time and become underemployed will have more negative work-related attitudes and well-being.

Method

Procedures and Participants

For this study, we collected data in Flanders in 2011–2012. Flanders is the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium that had an unemployment rate of 6.5% in October 2011 or around 191,000 non-working jobseekers (VDAB, 2011). The data were collected with a random sample of unemployed job seekers in three waves, each with a time interval of three months. We targeted 6,000 *short-term* unemployed individuals who had had paid jobs before they became unemployed. We chose to focus on short-term unemployed individuals since we wanted to exclude as much as possible those people who would feel obliged by the public employment agencies to be more flexible in their job search behavior. In Belgium, in the first six months of unemployment, unemployed jobseekers are allowed to—without financial penalty—refuse jobs which are not in line with their own preferences or profile (Vansteenkiste, Verbruggen & Sels, 2011). Afterwards, however, unemployed individuals risk losing (part of) their unemployment benefits if they either do not search for or refuse to accept jobs that are deemed "fitting" according to the criteria defined in the 'Law of Suitable Employment' (Wet van de Passende Dienstbetrekking). According to this law, a job is regarded as suitable even if it is in a different profession than the one in which an individual used to work, if it is not in line with one's educational background, if it demands a commuting time of up to four hours a day, and if it pays at least as much as the unemployment benefits. In certain situations, the public employment agencies have the option of shortening the protected period of six months if this is deemed sensible (e.g., when an individual's education or previous work experience can objectively be

regarded as offering him or her a poor chance of reintegrating into the labor market). Since we try to measure the effect of a flexible search when it is performed in a rather voluntary way, the individuals in our sample were at most four months unemployed when they participated in the study and therefore protected from public employment agency interventions.

Contact information of the 6,000 targeted individuals was provided by the Flemish public employment agency (VDAB). Participants had the opportunity to answer the questionnaire online or on paper. The first wave was conducted in October 2011 and reached 1,747 respondents (RR_{T1}= 29%), the second wave 1,159 respondents (RR_{T2}= 66%), and the last wave 965 respondents (RR_{T3}= 81%).

Given our focus on work-related attitudes and well-being, we restricted the dataset to those respondents who had found reemployment within the data collection time frame. In order to maximize the number of respondents in our analyses, we pooled the data on two time moments, as is frequently done in longitudinal research (see, e.g., Allen & de Grip, 2012). For the respondents who had already found employment when the second wave was conducted, we used the antecedents (e.g., FJSB) measured during the first wave and the employment outcomes measured during the second one. For the respondents who were still unemployed at the time of the second survey, but employed when the third one was administered, we used the antecedents of the second survey and the employment outcomes of the third one. As such, for every respondent there is a three month interval between the measurement of antecedents and outcomes. Our pooled dataset contains information for 302 respondents who were unemployed at T and were employed three months later (at T+1). The average age of our respondents was 37 years (SD 9.82); 59% of the respondents were female and 21% had low levels of education (i.e.,

at most, the second stage of secondary education). Respondents had on average been unemployed for 2.35 months (SD 1.88) at the first measurement moment.

We performed a drop-out analysis by using two multiple logistic regressions where the dependent variables were a dummy indicating whether one responded or not at respectively T2 and T3. The explanatory variables – all measured at T1 – were age, gender, ethnic origin, education, unemployment duration, flexible job search behavior with respect to pay/hierarchy, skill usage and commuting time, subjective norms, financial hardship, reemployment efficacy, employment commitment, career planning, career adaptability and job search intensity. We found that respondents at T2 were older, had more financial hardship and searched more intensified than the non-respondents. In addition, respondents at T3 were also older, had more financial hardship and were less of a non-European origin. Hence, we can conclude from this drop-out analysis that the attrition is not fully random, however, we found no differences in FJSB between respondents and non-respondents, which is the core variable of this study.

Measures

Flexible job search behavior. We generated an initial set of items to measure FJSB based on OECD policymakers' flexibility requirements regarding unemployed individuals (Ministry of Finance, 1998; Hasselpflug, 2005; Venn, 2012) and inspired by existing flexibility and underemployment scales (e.g., Van den Broeck et al., 2010). As policymakers mainly define FJSB from unemployed individuals in terms of content, pay/job level, and commuting time, we distinguished these dimensions in our initial set of items. Scholars at the EGOS Colloquium of 2011 in Gothenborg provided their input on a first version of the scale. Items were further refined in response to the comments we received at this conference. This refined version was discussed with several experts (e.g., people from the Flemish unemployment agency VDAB) and

scholars in the field. Finally, the face validity of the scale was tested by trying out and discussing the multidimensional scale with a number of unemployed individuals. In total, we retained nine items that measure the three proposed dimensions of FJSB. First, search flexibility regarding *skills* comprises three items measuring the degree to which respondents (also) respond to jobs that are not in line with their previous jobs or studies. For example, "I (also) search for jobs of which the content differs strongly from that of my previous job." Second, *pay/hierarchical* search flexibility consists of five items measuring the extent to which respondents (also) search for jobs that pay less or are at a lower hierarchical level compared with their previous jobs or educational levels. An example includes: "I (also) search for jobs which pay less than my previous job." Third, *commuting* search flexibility is a one-item measure that assesses the degree to which respondents (also) search for jobs that have longer commuting times between home and work than their previous jobs. Most studies that have examined commuting measure it as a one-item construct and focus merely on the commuting time or distance between home and work (e.g., Chapple, 2001; Clark, Huang & Withers, 2003; Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau & van Ommeren, 2010; Rouwendal, 2004; van Ommeren, Rietveld & Nijkamp, 1997, 1999). In line with these studies, we also included a one-item measure for commuting search flexibility. Participants indicated their response on all nine items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (definitely).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation on all nine items supports the three factors as explained above. The reliability of the skill and pay/hierarchical search flexibility scales were $\alpha = 0.83$ and $\alpha = 0.85$, respectively.

Underemployment. Like flexible job search behavior, underemployment is considered a multidimensional construct (Feldman, 1996; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). In line with the

measurement of flexible job search behavior and based on previous underemployment research, we differentiated between three underemployment dimensions: skill underutilization, pay/hierarchical underemployment, and commuting underemployment. The first dimension, *skill underutilization*, was measured with three items based on the measurement of Caplan et al. (1975). The items assessed the degree to which respondents were able to utilize their knowledge and skills in their new jobs (e.g., "Often I cannot use the knowledge and skills that I have acquired through prior work experience in my current job."). Second, *pay/hierarchical underemployment* was measured by assessing whether respondents were underpaid or working at a lower hierarchical level given their educational levels and previous work experience. Five items were used to assess this construct (e.g., "My current job pays less well than my previous one"; and "My current job has less responsibility than my previous one."). These items were based on the pay underemployment scale developed by Feldman et al. (2002) and the pay/hierarchical underemployment definition introduced by McKeeRyan and Harvey (2011). Finally, *commuting underemployment* was measured using one item that assessed whether participants had longer commuting times between home and work in their current jobs than in their previous jobs. Commuting underemployment is not a dimension that is often distinguished in underemployment research. However, since commuting generates significant psychological costs for the individual (see, e.g., Koslowsky, Kluger & Reich, 1995; Koslowsky, 1998), we believe that spending more time commuting could also be an important contributor to the experience of being underemployed. Indeed, like other underemployment factors, commuting is often considered a stressful experience that causes adverse emotional and physical reactions and has a negative impact on family life and health (Stutzer & Frey, 2008). The items from the three scales were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree).

Given the potential overlap between the different underemployment dimensions (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011), we performed an EFA to determine the underlying dimensionality. The EFA with varimax rotation established the three factors. However, one item of skill underemployment had to be removed due to high factor loadings on two factors. The alpha-coefficient of the skill underutilization and pay/hierarchical underemployment scales were 0.83 and 0.82, respectively.

Work-related attitudes and well-being. We measured four indicators of work-related attitudes and well-being, namely needs-supply fit, job satisfaction, work engagement, and turnover intentions. These four indicators have been extensively used in previous underemployment and job search research as indicators of work-related attitudes and well-being (e.g., Anderson & Winefield, 2011; Bolino & Feldman, 2000; Erdogan & Bauer, 2011; Maynard et al., 2006; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). *Needs-supply fit* was assessed by the four-item scale developed by Resick, Baltes & Shantz (2007). Participants pointed out how well their current jobs fit their needs or desires. A sample item is, "My job fits me well." Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing "totally disagree" and 5 representing "totally agree" (α=0.93). *Job satisfaction* was measured by one item based on Wanous, Reichers & Hudy (1997): "Taking all things together, how satisfied are you with your job?" on a seven-point Likert Scale (1= totally not satisfied and 7= totally satisfied). Results from Nagy (2002) demonstrate that a single-item measure for job satisfaction compares favourably with multiple-item measures. *Work engagement* was measured by nine items developed by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006), e.g., "At my work, I feel bursting with energy," or "I am enthusiastic about my job." Responses were indicated on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 ((almost) never) to 5 ((almost) always). Reliability of this scale was 0.95. Jiang and Klein's (2002) three-item

scale was used to measure *turnover intentions*. A sample item included, "I think a lot about leaving this organization." The response format was a five-point Likert Scale (1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree). The alpha-coefficient was 0.95.

Controls. Age and gender were used as control variables. Additionally, we used person-job fit in one's previous job as a control in the regressions on skill underutilization; wage in one's previous job in the regressions on pay/hierarchical underemployment; and commuting time in one's previous job in the regressions on commuting underemployment.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 10 presents descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables. First, we found positive correlations between each dimension of FJSB and its corresponding dimension of underemployment. That is, there was a positive correlation between skill search flexibility and skill underutilization ($r=0.23$, $p<0.01$), between pay/hierarchical search flexibility and pay/hierarchical underemployment ($r=0.27$, $p<0.01$), and between commuting search flexibility and commuting underemployment ($r=0.30$, $p<0.01$). The three dimensions of underemployment were negatively related to needs-supply fit, work engagement, and job satisfaction, and positively related to turnover intentions. No significant relationship was found, however, between commuting underemployment and needs-supply fit.

Path Analyses

Before examining our hypothesized model, we performed a CFA on our full model, including the three types of job search flexibility and underemployment, and the four types of work-related attitudes and well-being. The fit of this model was $\chi^2[159]=327.08$, $p<.01$; SRMR=0.05; RMSEA=0.06; CFI=0.95; NFI=0.90. This model performed significantly better

than a comparison model where only one dimension of FJSB and one dimension of underemployment was distinguished ($\chi^2[181]=894.51$, $p<.01$; SRMR=0.10; RMSEA=0.12; CFI=0.77; NFI=0.73; $\Delta\chi^2(22)=567,43$, $p<0.01$).

Next, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses of this study, as it allows multiple relationships to be tested simultaneously. First, we tested our model without the moderation effect of unemployment duration on the underemployment-work-related attitudes and well-being relationships. The fit of this model was $\chi^2[52]=90.66$, $p=.00$; SRMR=0.03; RMSEA=0.05; CFI=0.97; NFI=0.93[4]. Moreover, analysis of this model showed that unemployment duration did not impact each of the underemployment outcomes. Second, we examined the full hypothesized model, which includes the moderation effect of unemployment duration. We tested this moderation effect by including three interaction terms in the model: the products of unemployment duration and respectively skill underutilization, pay/hierarchical underemployment and commuting underemployment. Variables were mean centered before computing the interaction terms. The interaction terms were also mean centered before including them in the model, which helps to turn estimates resistant to possible biases from non-normal distributions (Lin, Wen, Marsh & Lin, 2010). The fit of this model was: $\chi^2[76]=107.36$, $p=.01$; SRMR=0.03; RMSEA=0.04; CFI=0.98; NFI=0.93. Figure 9 shows standardized path estimates for the research model[5].

[4] We also tested a model without interactions and extra relations from FJSB to work-related attitudes and well-being. The fit of this model was $\chi^2[49]=88.98$, $p=.00$; SRMR=0.03; RMSEA=0.05; CFI=0.97; NFI=0.94. All the direct relationships from the indicators of FJSB to work-related attitudes and well-being proved non-significant, indicating that a full-mediation model is more likely than a partial mediation model.

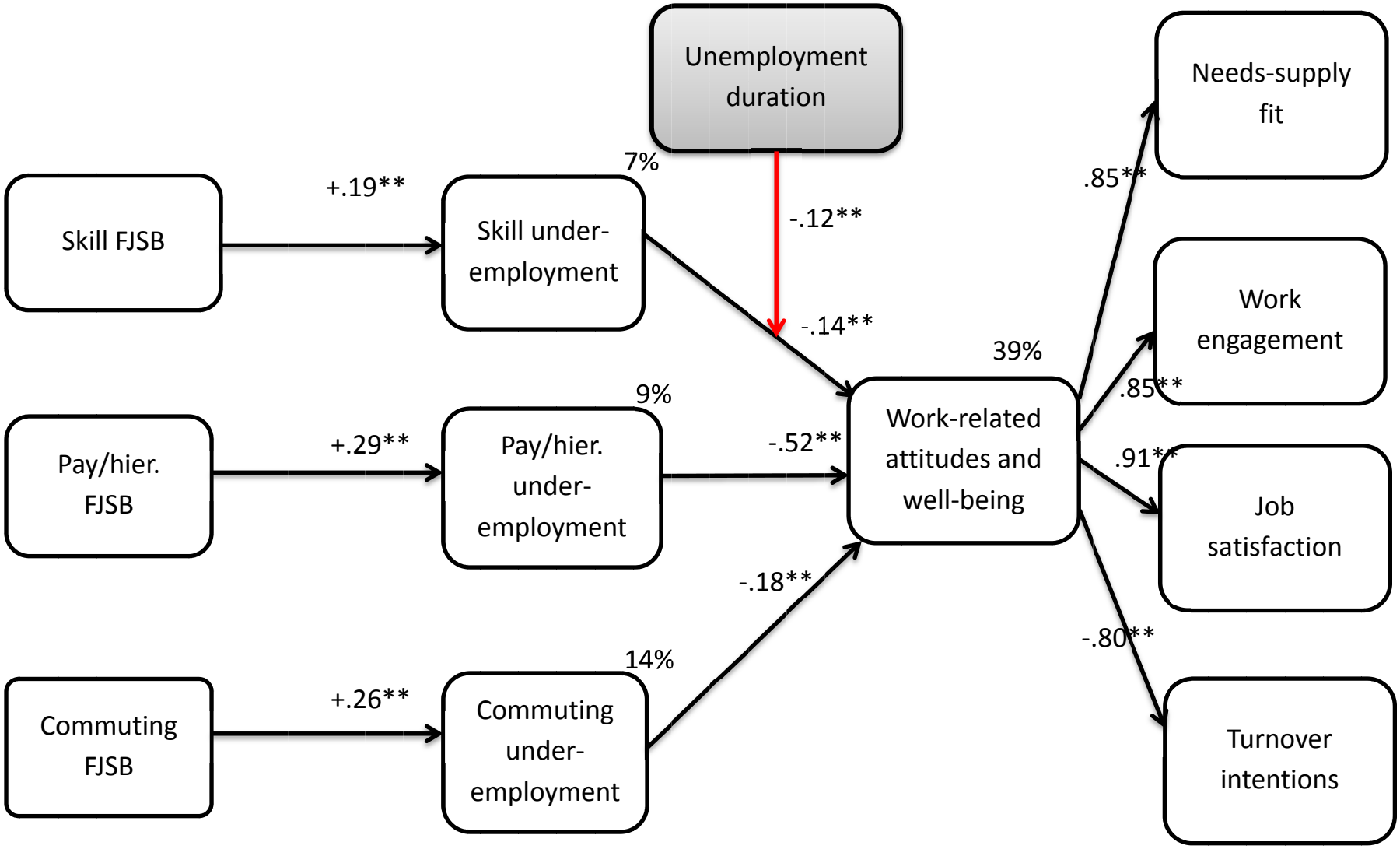
[5] We also tested a model including additional control variables (family status, origin, education, financial hardship, job search self-efficacy, reemployment efficacy, and whether one was fired from a previous job). The fit of this model was $\chi^2[25]=17.62$, $p=.86$; SRMR=0.02; RMSEA=0.00; CFI=1.00; NFI=0.99. Path weights were in line with those presented in figure 9.

Table 10. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables (n=302)

Variable	Mean (sd)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. age	37.34 (9.82)																		
2. gender	.59 (.49)	-.08																	
3. partner	.76 (.43)	.09	.02																
4. origin	.06 (.23)	-.05	.03	.00															
5. education	.21 (.41)	.20**	-.09	.10	-.06														
6. unemployment duration	2.35 (1.88)	.00	-.00	.01	.08	-.11*													
7. financial hardship	2.85 (1.06)	-.00	-.11	-.13*	-.00	.10	.08												
8. job search self-efficacy	3.13 (.51)	.12*	.05	.01	-.02	-.08	.37**	.06											
9. reemployment efficacy	2.37 (.70)	-.11*	-.04	-.04	-.02	-.07	-.19**	-.27**	-.01										
10. pay /hierarchical search flexibility	2.38 (.87)	.12*	-.13*	-.01	-.05	-.07	.25**	.09	.13*	-.20**									
11. skill search flexibility	3.11 (1.04)	-.11	-.05	-.07	.03	.03	.02	.14*	-.05	-.11	.36**								
12. commuting time search flexibility	2.45 (1.18)	-.08	-.16**	-.01	-.12*	.00	.05	-.00	.01	-.08	.28**	.25**							
13. pay /hierarchical underemployment	2.32 (1.07)	.02	-.08	.03	-.00	-.09	.09	.14*	-.05	-.16**	.27**	.14*	.04						
14. skill underutilization	2.75 (1.18)	.01	-.00	.07	.08	.12*	-.01	.02	-.13*	-.03	-.02	.23**	-.01	.26**					
15. commuting time underemployment	2.52 (1.54)	-.07	.05	-.05	.00	-.02	.11	.04	-.00	-.09	.04	.11	.30**	-.03	-.02				
16. needs-supply fit	3.43 (1.03)	.07	.07	.04	-.03	.10	.01	-.09	.12*	.08	-.10	-.12*	-.06	-.57**	-.31**	-.10			
17. work engagement	3.82 (.83)	.19**	.10	.09	.03	.10	-.02	.00	.09	.07	-.14*	-.11	-.13	-.42**	-.23**	-.13*	.74**		
18. job satisfaction	5.34 (1.32)	.10	.08	.04	.04	.09	.03	-.08	.09	.14*	-.06	-.04	-.08	-.46**	-.20**	-.15*	.77**	.77**	
19. turnover intentions	1.92 (1.18)	-.16**	-.09	-.06	-.06	-.08	-.01	.02	-.12*	-.05	.08	.10	.14*	.42**	.19**	.16**	-.63**	-.67**	-.76**

Note: ** p<0.01; * p<0.05

Figure 9. Standardized path coefficients of the relationship between flexible search behavior, underemployment, and work-related attitudes and well-being.

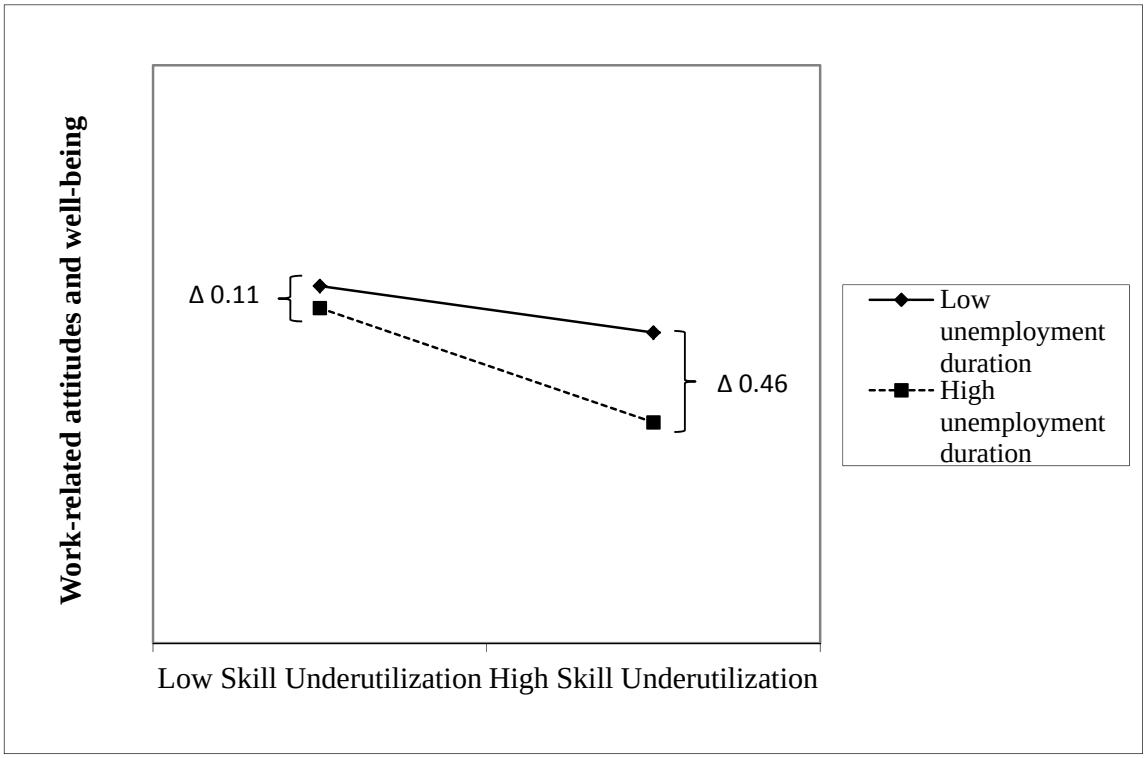


In the first hypothesis, a positive relationship was expected between FJSB and underemployment. We found support for this hypothesis for all three types of FJSB on their corresponding types of underemployment. That is, skill search flexibility was found to be positively related to skill underutilization (β=0.19, $p<0.01$); pay/hierarchical search flexibility was positively related to pay/hierarchical underemployment (β=0.29, $p<0.01$), and commuting search flexibility was positively related to commuting underemployment (β=0.26, $p<0.01$).

Next, in line with hypothesis two, we found that underemployment led to more negative work-related attitudes and well-being in terms of lower needs-supply fit, job satisfaction, and work engagement, and higher turnover intentions. Skill underutilization was negatively related to work-related attitudes and well-being (β_{skill} =-0.14, $p<0.01$). Furthermore, pay/hierarchical underemployment and commuting underemployment also had a negative impact on work-related attitudes and well-being ($\beta_{pay/hierarchy}$=-0.52, $p<0.01$; $\beta_{commuting}$=-0.18, $p<0.01$).

Hypothesis three anticipated that people who are unemployed for longer periods of time and become underemployed will have more negative work-related attitudes and well-being. However, we only found partial support for this hypothesis. As expected, we found that unemployment duration moderated the relationship between skill underutilization and work-related attitudes and well-being (β=-0.12, $p<0.01$). The interaction plot (Figure 10) confirms that the interaction was in the hypothesized direction. Thus, if respondents were unemployed for a shorter duration, they experienced more work-related attitudes and well-being if they ended up in jobs that underutilized their acquired skills than respondents who were unemployed for a longer period of time. We did not find these moderation effects with respect to pay/hierarchical and commuting underemployment.

Figure 10. Interaction of unemployment duration and skill underutilization predicting needs-supply fit.



Note: Low values: (mean - 1SD); high values: (mean + 1SD)

Discussion

In this study, we investigated the relationship between an unemployed individual's job search behavior and four indicators of work-related attitudes and well-being: person-job fit, job satisfaction, work engagement, and turnover intentions. Hereto, we focused on flexible job search behavior, i.e., the extent to which a jobseeker also responds to job openings that have different characteristics from his or her previous job and/or studies in terms of content, pay/hierarchy, or commuting time. The analyses supported our proposed model and indicated that flexible job searching more often leads to underemployment, which in turn results in more negative work-related attitudes and well-being. Having negative work-related attitudes and well-being may induce individuals to leave their jobs and become unemployed again. In this way, a flexible job search could cause one to obtain a less sustainable job and career path.

In addition, we examined whether unemployment duration moderated the underemployment-work-related attitudes and well-being relationship. Our results indicated that this was only partly the case. People who are unemployed for longer periods of time and become underemployed with respect to their skills have a lower level of work-related attitudes and well-being. Finally, we found no moderation effect of unemployment duration on the relationships with pay/hierarchical and commuting underemployment. Thus, being underemployed on these dimensions is experienced as being equally negative by all individuals, independent of their unemployment duration. We assumed that those unemployed for relatively shorter periods of time more often end up being underemployed as a well-considered choice, whereas those unemployed for longer may often end up there due to pressure (e.g., anxiety to find a job, financial strain). Perhaps individuals underestimate the negative effects of working for lower pay or further from home. For instance, a jobseeker may consciously choose for a job with a more extensive commuting time, and before actually working in the job, believe that the burden of his or her longer commute will be bearable. However, once he or she actually experiences this commute, s/he may ascertain that s/he underestimated its associated stress, due to, for instance, unforeseen traffic jams and delays.

Implications for theory

In this study, we used a multidisciplinary approach and combined insights from both job search and underemployment literature. As such, we made valuable theoretical contributions to these different research streams. So far, most studies have found little explanatory power for models that measure the link between search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being (Koen et al., 2010; Saks, 2005; Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002). The lack of support is mainly due to the narrow approach to studying job search behavior thus far (Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Indeed, up to now, most job search research has focused on search intensity as an indicator of search behavior, whereas there is a need to also

look at other indicators (Koen et al., 2010; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Koen and colleagues (2010) were one of the first research groups to broaden job search measurement, by focusing on the strategies unemployed individuals use in their searches. In this study, we added yet another dimension: how flexible people search for jobs. By focusing on this type of search behavior, we responded to the call to introduce more job search variables in job search research and demonstrated that it is an important predictor of work-related attitudes and well-being.

Next, we used underemployment as a mediator in our model. As such, we found support for the relationship between search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being, which had previously remained weak at best (Koen et al., 2010; Saks, 2005; Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002). Moreover, by linking underemployment and job search behavior, we also examined *how* people end up in substandard jobs, which has rarely been investigated (Feldman, 1996; Maynard, 2011). As such, we gained some important insights that can be beneficial for underemployment research. Furthermore, we considered commuting underemployment as one of the dimensions of underemployment. To date, commuting underemployment has been neglected in underemployment research, even though commuting has proven to generate significant psychological costs for the individual (see, e.g., Koslowsky et al., 1995; Koslowsky, 1998; Stutzer & Frey, 2008). We demonstrate that commuting underemployment is an important dimension of underemployment, as it has similar negative consequences on work-related attitudes and well-being as the other types of underemployment.

Furthermore, we found that pay/hierarchical underemployment has the biggest negative impact on work-related attitudes and well-being. Past research has suggested that pay level has only a moderate influence on work-related attitudes and well-being (e.g., Judge et al., 2010). In this study, we investigate pay/hierarchical underemployment and not pay

underemployment and job level underemployment as separate dimensions. This procedure is in line with recent developments in the underemployment literature (e.g., McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011) and was supported by the results of our EFA. It is possible that both aspects (pay and hierarchical level) reinforce each other, which explains why we found such a significant impact of this indicator on work-related attitudes and well-being. Nevertheless, our results indicate that, together, the pay and hierarchical level of one's current job have a large significant impact on how an individual experiences his or her job.

Finally, by using unemployment duration as a moderator in the relationship between underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being, we demonstrated that the conditions under which people end up being underemployed matter for its consequences. Few researchers have examined the impact of unemployment duration on job search relationships whereas policymakers attach importance to unemployment duration and often formulate policy measures that depend on it. For instance, unemployed jobseekers are often not obliged to search flexibly when they first become unemployed. It is only after a predefined unemployment period—which depends on the specific OECD country concerned—that individuals are expected to engage in more FJSB (Venn, 2012). Our results show that it is important to place more attention on the impact of the unemployment duration. On the other hand, we also observed that the unemployment duration did not moderate every proposed relationship, but rather depended on the type of underemployment studied. This observation indicates that it is important to distinguish between the different dimensions of underemployment and thus not to define underemployment as a one-dimensional construct.

Implications for policy and practice

Policymakers take a positive stance towards unemployed individuals' flexibility and expect that it will increase their chances of acquiring new jobs (e.g., Ministry of Finance, 1998). We demonstrated that there are also downsides of searching flexibly during the job

search process. However, although we found several negative effects of FJSB, we cannot conclude that this type of behavior should be totally discouraged, as it is possible that the "choice" to accept a less-than-ideal job is temporary and that it should be seen as a stepping stone towards a better and more sustainable job. Prolonged research is needed to determine whether these poorer quality jobs are indeed a stepping stone or rather a trap. Furthermore, in this study we focused on short-term unemployment; thus, the respondents who engaged in flexible job search behavior mainly did this on "voluntary" ground, i.e., without much pressure from the Flemish public employment agency. As such, we do not know the precise effects of a flexible search if it were to be induced or enforced by a public employment agency. On the one hand, one could expect that if unemployed individuals were pressured to be flexible, it would have a more pronounced negative impact on their work-related attitudes and well-being, as they would then be encouraged to accept jobs they dislike. On the other hand, however, it is possible that the results of the current study are more negative on work-related attitudes and well-being, as those who are now voluntarily flexible could be more often those individuals who have no other choice if they want to find new jobs. If *everyone* is then expected to be flexible in order to maintain unemployment benefits, this selection-effect may be erased, resulting in a greater number of individuals who do find jobs they like, making the negative link between flexible job search behavior and work-related attitudes and well-being *less* pronounced.

On the basis of this study, then, we cannot make an all-inclusive verdict of the impact of FJSB or whether this behavior should continue to be enforced by policymakers. However, we can conclude that as long as we do not have a comprehensive understanding of the total impact of flexible job searching, policymakers should be cautious when promoting or obliging people to search flexibly and keep in mind that his type of search can have negative effects on unemployed jobseekers' work-related attitudes and well-being. Moreover, our

results also indicate that several additional measures are needed to make the promotion of FJSB more successful. First, an important task is set aside for employment services and their reemployment counselors. Counselors should pay special attention to flexible jobseekers and help them to choose jobs and career paths that meet their expectations and desires. In the same vein, counselors should advise flexible jobseekers not to waste their energy on exploring job opportunities they dislike and raise their awareness of the importance and future consequences of their job choices. Second, employers should be encouraged to offer real career perspectives to their new employees; this can ensure that the latter less often feel as though their jobs are a trap, but are instead able to perceive them as a stepping stone to jobs they like and feel enriched by. This could, for instance, be done by paying more attention to possibilities of job enrichment as one's working experience grows, like increasing the number of responsibilities in one's job or expanding one's job content.

Limitations and directions for future research

There are several limitations connected with this study that should be addressed in future research. First, as this study was conducted in Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, it is possible that cultural factors influenced our results. For example, although Belgium is a rather small country, most Belgians want short commutes between home and work (OECD, 2011). It is therefore possible that commuting underemployment has a stronger negative effect on work-related attitudes and well-being than in countries with a stronger commuting culture. Future research could therefore examine the effect of different cultural influences on our model. Furthermore, in line with most research on commuting (e.g., Chapple, 2001; Clark et al., 2003; Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau & van Ommeren, 2010; Rouwendal, 2004; van Ommeren et al., 1997, 1999), we included a one-item measure of commuting search flexibility and underemployment. Perhaps in larger countries, an additional item could be added that measures the degree to which people want to move or relocate (commuting

search flexibility) or have to move or relocate in order to perform their new jobs (commuting underemployment).

Second, institutional factors could play an important role. For instance, in countries where the system of unemployment benefits is less generous (i.e., shorter duration and/or lower level of benefits), the pressure to accept any kind of job may be greater, and hence the consequences may be more pronounced. The same story can apply if unemployed jobseekers experience more pressure from the government to search flexibly. It may therefore be interesting to delve deeper into examining the influence of institutional systems on the impact of searching flexibly.

Third, there was only three months between when we measured the antecedents and the outcomes. Using a longer time frame could give better indications of the sustainability of newly acquired jobs. Hall's learning cycles (2002) emphasize that individuals will experience periods of transition that, inevitably, lead to initially lower performance. However, Hall also assumed that individuals will quickly improve, benefit from previous job experience, and eventually end up at a higher level of subjective success than before. Based on this reasoning, it could be that the initial transition phase (which we observed) is temporary and that the work situation will ameliorate with time. However, it could also be that our observed negative effects become even more prominent with time. Underemployment research suggests that people do not leave their substandard jobs easily and that arriving in a substandard job may lock individuals in a downward career path (e.g., Büchel & Mertens, 2004). Future research could look into this and try to map the circumstances under which an individual does or does not pick up after a transition.

Conclusion

The present study aimed at combining insights from job search and underemployment research to improve our understanding of both research fields. First, by examining FJSB, we

provided more insight into *how* people end up in substandard jobs. Our results show that people who search flexibly regarding their skills, pay/hierarchical level, or commuting time are more likely to end up underemployed in terms of these dimensions. Second, we demonstrated that underemployment acts as a mediator between FJSB and work-related attitudes and well-being: searching flexibly increases one's chance of becoming underemployed, which in turn results in more negative work-related attitudes and well-being. Hence, although flexibility is considered one of the key behaviors in the job search process by both policymakers and scholars (see, e.g., Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Venn, 2012), there may be negative consequences to having job search flexibility during the job search process in terms of job quality.

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CHAPTER 5.

EPILOGUE

Introduction

A flexible job search refers to the extent to which jobseekers look for jobs that deviate from their studies and earlier work experience (Van den Broeck, 2010; Venn, 2012). This type of job search among unemployed individuals has been given more and more attention by both policymakers and scholars. Up to now however, there has only been limited understanding of which unemployed jobseekers perform a flexible job search and what the consequences are of this flexibility for their reemployment success. The overall aim of this dissertation was to enhance this understanding.

In a first empirical study, we studied the impact of flexibility as an attitude jobseekers may have. In recent career thinking, flexibility denotes people's attitudes towards crossing career boundaries (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009) or people's perceived capacity to envision a variety of career options (Forret, Sullivan & Mainiero, 2010; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Tams & Arthur, 2010). In an unemployment context, we defined it as a jobseeker's willingness to accept jobs that deviate from the previous job(s) and/or that are not in line with the educational background (cf. Peiró, García-Montalvo & Gracia, 2002; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens & De Witte, 2010). In chapter two, we proposed an operationalization of this type of flexibility and tested its impact on reemployment success.

In the second and third empirical study, we studied flexibility as a job search behavior. Here, we proposed a multi-dimensional measurement of flexible job search behavior, based on OECD policymakers' flexibility demands regarding unemployed individuals and on the literature related to the job choice process – i.e., the job design, job fit, willingness to

sacrifice, and underemployment literature. In chapter three, we looked at who approached his/her job search in a flexible way and tested the impact of this flexible job search behavior on the reemployment likelihood. In the fourth chapter, we also investigated the impact of flexible job search behavior on the reemployment quality.

In this concluding fifth chapter, we start with an overview of the five main results of the three empirical studies. In the second part of this chapter, we propose and discuss five potential adjustments to current policy, which may provide useful thoughts for policy, public employment services (and their consultants), employers and academic research. To end this epilogue, we suggest five avenues for future research.

Five main findings of the empirical studies

Finding 1. Flexible unemployed search more intensely, but not with greater reemployment success

A first important finding of this dissertation is that flexible unemployed search more intensely for a new job, but in the end, this does not increase their reemployment likelihood. In the first and second empirical study, we hypothesized that flexible unemployed individuals would demonstrate a more intensified job search. The findings of both studies indeed showed that flexible unemployed individuals engage more frequently in different job search activities. Having a more intensified job search is seen as a behavior which should increase reemployment likelihood (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). Although we concluded that higher levels of job search intensity result in more job interviews, we found that this positive effect did not result in more job offers or a higher reemployment likelihood. Indeed, our findings show that flexible unemployed have more difficulties in convincing employers they are a good match as they experience more employer-related constraints in the job search process. The fact that they to a lesser extent succeed in convincing employers to offer them a job, could be due to several reasons. It could

be that the flexible applicants come across as insufficiently motivated for the job, as too insecure, as not knowing what they want, which is supported by our finding that having less of a career plan in mind is associated with a more flexible job search (chapter three). This could be resolved by interventions increasing the quality and goal-orientedness of career planning of these individuals (see 'adjustment two' further on). However, it is also possible that employers – to some extent – fear that flexible individuals may leave the organization rapidly or that the training investments in these candidates will be too high. Most likely these employers attach a lot of importance to previous working experience or the previous career path, whereas focusing more on the competences one has, may take away some of the doubts (see 'adjustment five' below). Anyway, this finding shows that flexibility has the potential to be a successful search strategy as it increases one's search intensity, but that sometimes something may go wrong along the process. The good news is that we believe that these negative effects could be (partly) moderated. In this respect, we suggest some recommendations for potential adjustments in the second part of this epilogue.

Finding 2. Flexible unemployed more often end up in jobs of more negative quality

A second major finding of this dissertation is that searching flexibly often leads to a job of lower quality. Indeed, in the third empirical study, we focused on the impact of flexible job search behavior on work-related attitudes and well-being, hereby combining insights from both the job search and underemployment literature. We focused on four types of work-related attitudes and well-being as outcomes: person-job fit, job satisfaction, work engagement, and turnover intentions. Our analyses indicated that a flexible job search more often leads to underemployment, which in turn results in more negative work-related attitudes and well-being. Hence, being flexible when searching for a job increases the risk of having a less sustainable career path.

Finding 3. Flexibility has a dark side

We may conclude that flexibility is not so positive as is often expected by policymakers and scholars. Up to now, most scholars saw no negative side to the flexibility of the unemployed, but rather believed this to be an imperative component of career success (e.g. Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004; Hall, 2004; Koen et al., 2010; Mervish & Hall, 1994). In this dissertation, we used a micro-perspective on the flexibility of unemployed individuals and observed that flexibility is not always associated with unilaterally positive outcomes in terms of job offers and reemployment quality. Our results therefore show that there may be limits to flexibility, in particular when people are left on their own without any guidance (see also 'adjustment two' further on). Perhaps too little attention has been given to the potential dark side of flexibility in new career thinking up to now. Adapting a more nuanced view on flexibility may take careers research a step forward. In its original meaning, flexibility refers to a tree which due to windfall will bend, but of which its branches will eventually regain their initial position. Hence, flexibility denotes being able to yield, but also to recover (Sennett, 1998). Policymakers can ask unemployed individuals to yield, but they should pay attention to each individual's capacity to recover from this demand. It seems that not all unemployed will be able to do this successfully, which is something that should be kept in mind in future policymaking and research. Moreover, it should also be noted from our results that flexible unemployed individuals do not solely determine their own reemployment success. In the current notions of the protean career, the emphasis may be too strongly on the own responsibility for future career success. Our results suggest that unemployed individuals are also subject to structural components, i.e., circumstances which they cannot control. This could be taken more into account when thinking about new career concepts.

Finding 4. Broader perspective on job search behavior

An added value of this dissertation is the introduction of a new type of job search behavior in job search research, which has increased the understanding of unemployed individuals' reemployment likelihood and quality. Thus far, most job search research focused on the impact of job search intensity, i.e. the frequency with which certain job search activities are performed (Kanfer, Wanberg & Kantrowitz, 2001; Saks, 2005). It has been a good predictor of a number of job search outcomes, like the number of job interviews and job offers received, and the likelihood and speed of reemployment (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). Also other job search behaviors like job search effort, the use of (in)formal job sources, and the use of preparatory and active job search have been positively related to the number of job interviews or job offers (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005; Saks & Ashforth, 1999). However, their predictive power for other search outcomes, like reemployment quality, is rather low (Saks, 2005; Koen et al., 2010). The studies of Wanberg et al. (1999 & 2000) and Werbel (2000) for instance, found that job search intensity did not significantly predict job satisfaction, job improvement or turnover intentions. Some authors have argued that how selective people can be in their job choice may matter for its consequences on reemployment quality (Wanberg, Hough & Song, 2002). By focusing not (only) on how hard people search or on which search channels they use, but rather on the content of their job search and thus on which types of jobs they take into consideration, we have been able to enrich our insights into the complex relationship between job search behavior and job search success indicators – such as the number of job interviews, the number of job offers, reemployment likelihood and reemployment quality. Moreover, in addition to existing research that mainly studied flexibility as one specific type of attitude (e.g. Van den Broeck et al., 2012) and as a single concept (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009; Briscoe, Henagan, Burton & Murphy, 2012; Enache, Sallan, Simo & Fernandez, 2011;

Verbruggen, 2012), we conceptualized it as a job search behavior and distinguished several types: flexible job search behavior with respect to pay/job level, job content and commuting time.

Some studies on job search behavior have also considered more qualitative indicators instead of the more quantitative types such as search intensity or search effort. Koen and colleagues (2010), for instance, focused on the *job search strategy* unemployed can use to find a new job, whereas Taris (2002) studied the *job search width*. Though both concepts are related to our concept of flexible job search behavior, they are also distinct. One's job search strategy indicates how one gathers information during the job search: in an explorative, haphazard or focused manner. Hence, this concept does not tell what types of jobs unemployed are interested in. The confirmatory factor analysis of chapter 3 supported the fact that job search strategy is conceptually different than flexible job search behavior. Moreover, Koen et al. (2010) were not able to predict much variance in reemployment quality through job search strategy, whereas in chapter 4, we were able to successfully link flexible job search behavior to this outcome. Job search width points to the degree to which unemployed individuals also apply for jobs that do not match their interests and capacities, or that are far away from home (Taris, 2002, p. 47). We approached our concept of flexible job search behavior in a multidimensional manner, which enabled us to clearly distinguish different attributes people can look for in a job. This an important difference to Taris' conceptualization of job search width. Moreover, we based our choice for the three dimensions on different literature streams which all demonstrate the importance of the respective dimensions as job attributes in the job selection process. Additionally, confirmatory factor analysis supported using a multidimensional approach. The results of chapter 3 and 4 also demonstrated that the different types of flexibility are sometimes influenced by other aspects or can be linked with different magnitude to outcomes like work-

related attitudes and well-being. Moreover, the research models we proposed are richer than the one studied by Taris (2002). Whereas Taris only looks at reemployment as outcome, we used different indicators of job search success (such as the number of job interviews and job offers), which enabled us to obtain richer insights in to what happens during the job search process.

As such, we believe we made some important contributions to the job search literature, by introducing a refined measurement of job search behavior. However, the studies we presented in this dissertation also show the need of further reflection about the multidimensionality of job search behavior and its translation in meaningful predictors of job search outcomes. We believe much can be gained from continuing on this road and focusing research more on what types of jobs unemployed are searching for. For instance, the three-pronged measure of flexible job search behavior we used in this dissertation could easily be extended to include even more types of flexibility. We based the distinction of these three types on existing policy regulations in OECD countries, but also on the literature related to the job choice process, i.e. the job design, job fit, willingness to sacrifice, and underemployment literature. However, the job choice literature makes mentioning of still other types of job attributes people find important in their job and that may influence their decision to accept or reject a job offer. Boswell et al. (2003) show that attributes like company culture, advancement opportunities, nature of work (e.g., challenging or not), training provided, work/non-work balance, vacation time, level of job security, size of company, international assignments, reputation of the company and type of industry all matter to some extent in the job decision process. These attributes may also impact the job search of unemployed individuals, with some of them willing to be flexible upon certain of these characteristics whereas others not. Future research could investigate this further, trying to identify and study other types of flexible job search behavior. We therefore encourage

scholars to adopt a broader view on job search behavior in the future, as we demonstrated that this could increase our understanding of the job search process.

Finding 5. Career variables impact job search behavior (to some extent)

In chapter three, we successfully linked two career variables (career adaptability and career planning) to flexible job search behavior. We showed that having more fuzzy career goals (i.e., having less career planning) stimulates unemployed individuals to search for jobs which pay less or have a lower job level than the previous job (i.e. being flexible with respect to pay/hierarchy) and for jobs in other job domains (i.e. being flexible with respect to skills). Hence, those putting in less forethought about the type of career they want, search for jobs in a more flexible way. We also found that being career adaptable incites searching for jobs with a different job content and in wider geographical areas. Scholars more and more try to link career attitudes to job search behaviors (e.g., Zikic & Saks, 2009; Koen et al., 2010). Still, there is a need to further integrate career research into job search research as this could help explain why unemployed perform certain search activities and why these may lead to success or failure. With our research, we added to the understanding of the job search of unemployed individuals by looking at insights from career research. Both career and job search scholars should be encouraged to continue along the same road in the future, as both research domains can come to valuable insights by interacting more.

Five potential adjustments to current policy.

The main results discussed in the previous section indicated that flexibility among unemployed jobseekers has downsides in terms of job quality and job offers received. Thus far, flexibility has been seen by policymakers as a solution for the increased mismatch between labor demand and supply, caused by a discrepancy between, on the one hand, the characteristics and requirements of the available jobs, and on the other hand, jobseekers' preferences and skills (Barlevy, 2011; Kosfeld et al., 2008; Herremans et al., 2011). It has

been believed that stimulating unemployed individuals to broaden their job search and take into account job opportunities that deviate from their initial preferences would increase the labor supply for a given labor demand and as such improve the matching process. Based on the results of this dissertation then, should we abandon flexibility as a solution for the current mismatch on the labor market and look for other options? We believe not. However, we do believe that adjustments have to be made in order to make flexibility a (more) successful strategy for unemployed jobseekers. The purpose of this section is to discuss five potential adjustments to current policy or way of thinking which could help make flexibility a more successful strategy.

We base the proposed adjustments on the results of the three empirical studies as well as on the results of a survey conducted in one of our recent studies (see Vansteenkiste et al., 2013, forthcoming). In this study, we surveyed a select group of high-level members of the public employment services of six countries, one of every of the six clusters of OECD-countries we distinguished in the first chapter of this dissertation[6]. This survey was conducted in order to obtain more in-debt information regarding the requirements relating to flexible job search behavior, the way in which this behavior is monitored and inventoried, and the sanctions applied in case of insufficiently flexible search behavior. Luxembourg was chosen

[6] *Cluster 1* consists of Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia. It is characterized by a strict policy on wage and occupational flexibility demands and a moderate policy with respect to the geographical flexibility. The flexibility demands are accompanied by the most severe sanctions of all clusters. *Cluster 2* is composed of Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The wage flexibility demands are strictly interpreted, with unemployed jobseekers being required to accept all job offers regardless of pay. With respect to job content and commuting time, requirements are moderate. The sanctions for refusing job offers that are in line with the flexibility demands are relatively soft. *Cluster 3* contains Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Romania and Spain. These countries have a strict policy on wage flexibility, with scores of 4 or 5 out of 5, but are less strict in their geographical demands and even relatively lenient in their occupational flexibility demands. The sanctions imposed in this group of countries vary from being mild (suspension of benefits of 10-14 weeks) to severe (indefinite suspension of benefits). *Cluster 4* encloses Czech Republic, Norway and Slovenia. These three countries are typified by a strict policy on all three flexibility demands. The accompanying sanctions differ however in this group of countries, with Czech Republic and Slovenia having a suspension of benefits for more than 14 weeks or even indefinitely, while in Norway unemployed jobseekers only lose entitlement to benefits for 8 weeks. *Cluster 5* is made up of Austria, Estonia and France. The policies in these countries are the least severe. Moreover, the unemployment benefit penalties applied in these countries are also among the least stringent.

to represent cluster one, the Netherlands for cluster two, Belgium for cluster three, Norway for cluster four, Austria for cluster five and Denmark for cluster six. We will refer to the surveyed countries from time to time.

Adjustment 1. Look at the future career of unemployed jobseekers rather than the future job.

The first adjustment we propose concerns a shift in focus of policymakers and public employment services from 'the next job' (short-term view on unemployed jobseekers immediate reemployment probability) to 'the future career' (long-term view on stable and qualitative career path). From chapter one we learn that almost all OECD countries require some form of flexibility from their unemployed job seekers. Some countries are very strict in their interpretation of these flexibility demands. Norway, Czech Republic and Slovenia, for instance, require from unemployed individuals to take on any job, no matter what the wage, commuting time or job content entails. In addition, almost every country (with the exception of Austria, Estonia and France) has a maximum strictness score on at least one of the three flexibility dimensions. The reason why these flexibility demands are implemented mainly starts from the assumption that this may help unemployed find a job faster (Grubb, 2001; Hasselpflug, 2005; Venn, 2012). Hence, in implementing this activation policy, governments are mainly concerned in directing unemployed persons fast to reemployment, without much regard of the impact of the requested flexibility on the quality of the found job or remaining career.

One of the strengths of this dissertation is that we offered a broader perspective by investigating the impact of flexibility on both the likelihood ánd quality of reemployment. Based on our findings, we favor and urge for a long-term view on activating unemployed (i.e., helping unemployed to find long-lasting, sustainable employment) instead of the short-term view which is too often prioritized (i.e., helping an unemployed to find a job as fast as they

can, no matter what type of job they end up with). Research has shown that unemployed finding low quality jobs experience the same negative feelings as if they would have continued to be unemployed (Feldman & Leana, 2000; McKee-Ryan, Virick, Prussia, Harvey & Lilly, 2009). In this way, finding a 'bad' job is not always better than simply remaining unemployed. The results of chapter four demonstrate that flexibility leads to finding jobs of lower quality and could result in obtaining less sustainable career paths. Governments could (and should) take into account such consequences in their activating policies towards unemployed. This implies developing a long term perspective concerning the requirements towards unemployed individuals' job search behavior. This long-term perspective should then be translated in a policy where public employment services are allowed to think about the future career path of the unemployed rather than merely their next job.

Adjustment 2. Match job search and career counseling support.

Secondly, we suggest to provide more career support to flexible unemployed jobseekers than is currently the case. From chapter three, we learned that unemployed who to a lesser extent have a career plan in mind are more flexible in their job search. One of the reasons why flexible unemployed could have difficulties in obtaining real job offers may have to do with this lack of career vision, which may make them come across less confident and determined during the recruitment process. As such, it may be beneficial for flexible unemployed to receive a modified version of career counseling which could help them making a plan for their further career. Up to now, most of the surveyed public employment services do not seem to provide much career support to unemployed individuals, but rather focus their activities on providing job search support. Norway is an exception, as their public employment service delivers free vocational guidance within its general placement service, which includes a career choice and career learning program (Duell, Singh & Tergeist, 2009). It seems rather strange to expect from unemployed individuals to have a broad search scope

and to reorient, without providing any kind of support directed at guiding people to deal with these required changes.

One useful approach for the public employment services to offer career facilities is the CIP approach (Cognitive Information Processing Theory) (Peterson, Sampson & Reardon, 1991; Peterson, Sampson, Reardon & Lenz, 1996; Sampson, Lenz, Reardon & Peterson, 1999; Sampson, Peterson, Reardon & Lenz, 2000a; Peterson, Sampson, Lenz & Reardon, 2002; Sampson, Reardon, Peterson,& Lenz, 2004). Two core constructs are distinguished in the CIP approach: (1) the *content* of career problem solving and decision making: what do people know about themselves, their career situation and options?; and (2) the *process* of career problem solving and decision making: are people able to make career decisions and act accordingly? The idea is to screen individuals for the extent to which they are ready to make career decisions and to provide more career support as one has less knowledge about one's future career and is less able to shape the own career (Samspon et al. 2003). As such, overserving or underserving individuals with career support is avoided as much as possible and the limited financial and time resources of public employment services and its counselors can be taken into account. The initial screening can be performed by counselors using the Career Thoughts Inventory measurement (Sampson et al., 1996) in addition to (face-to-face) interaction with the jobseeker. Depending on the outcome of the screening, unemployed can be referred to different services (Sampson et al. 2000, 2003, 2004; Peterson et al., 2002). Individuals who are judged to have a high career decision readiness can be referred to self-help career services. These include "career resource rooms and Internet websites designed to assist individuals in selecting, locating, sequencing, and using needed resources with little or no assistance from staff" (Sampson et al., 2003, p. 4). Next, individuals with moderate and low levels of career decision readiness can be referred to respectively brief staff-assisted services and individual case-managed services (Sampson et al., 2003). Here, public

employment services could engage in a closer cooperation with recognized career centers and refer the unemployed to these career centers when necessary. In Flanders, the public employment service already joins forces with career centers to offer services to *employed* persons. That is, working individuals (with at least one year of working experience) are eligible to 8 hours of career counseling every six years by recognized career centers. In this approach, it seems to be neglected that also unemployed individuals may benefit from career counseling. A useful policy adjustment may be to let the public employment service also refer unemployed individuals to customized career services where needed. Anyway, we believe that the step-wise approach of CIP theory could help unemployed individuals without overloading public employment services' counselors too much with extra tasks which do not lie in their area of expertise.

Adjustment 3. Provide counseling support from the beginning of the unemployment period, but also offer a breading space.

Third, based on our findings, we believe it is important to offer career support as quickly as possible in one's unemployment spell. In the studies of chapter three and four, we focused on short-term unemployed and showed that in general being flexible in the job search does not produce the expected results in terms of reemployment chances and may lead to entering jobs that are often associated with more negative work-related attitudes and well-being. This indicates that flexible unemployed should not be left to their own fate, but are in need of career and job search support *in the early days* of their unemployment. Of the six countries we surveyed, Luxembourg fits this suggestion best, since unemployed jobseekers have monthly contacts with a counselor. In Austria, Denmark and Norway, these meetings take place (at least) every three months. In the Netherlands, interventions are scheduled after 4, 7 and 10 months of unemployment. In Belgium the timing and intensity of interventions can be different, depending on its necessity as evaluated by the unemployed individual's

counselor. More frequent and intensive interventions are provided to those unemployed who are deemed to have greater needs ("systeem van sluitend maatpak"). From our results, flexible jobseekers seem to be more in need of frequent and intensive counseling and could particularly benefit from having career counseling from the start of their unemployment period. This suggestion goes against Dutch policy changes which are currently in the pipeline. In particular, in the Netherlands, it is intended to downsize the services provided by public employment counselors, and to increasingly rely on e-services. Whereas we believe e-services could be beneficial for those individuals who already have high career decision readiness, it could prove detrimental for those who have little or none. Given our findings, it seems counter-intuitive to demand a lot of flexibility from the unemployed – as is the case in the Netherlands –, but at the same time leave these unemployed at their own fate.

Our results also imply that unemployed jobseekers could profit from several weeks of breading space in which they have time to reflect upon their future career and can come up with a strategy in which they address future employers more motivated and confident. In particular, it could be interesting to not force unemployed jobseekers into a broad and flexible job search in the first months of unemployment as this may compel them to apply for jobs which they are not motivated to or which do not fit their future career prospects. This firstly, may discourage employers in hiring them and secondly, may lead to less fitting jobs and thus perhaps to less sustainable careers.

Adjustment 4. Monitor the extent to which flexibility demands are actually executed, imposed and sanctioned.

If governments want to continue enforcing flexibility upon unemployed jobseekers (after some while), it is relevant to start monitoring more closely how this demand is executed and imposed. One of the striking results of the survey conducted in Vansteenkiste et al. (2013, forthcoming) among the representatives of the public employment services, is that five out of

six mentioned not knowing to which degree these flexibility demands are actually enforced by its counselors and executed by jobseekers; the only exception being Denmark. In Norway – the country representing the cluster with the most severe policies with unemployed jobseekers being required to take on any suitable job – this was indicated as follows:

> "*Yes, the jobseeker is expected to take on any suitable job regardless of previous wage, geographical location or job content. There are exceptions to this general rule, and although the general rule applies it is probably safe to say that many jobseekers are not in adherence with the mobility demands with respect to wage, geography, job content and/or studies. This happens by way of the jobseeker not applying for a vacant position and/or not accepting a job match for a vacant position. How frequent this happens is uncertain.[…] There is [currently] a debate on the rate of actual compliance to the mobility demands. Whereas the mobility demands are clearly stated, there is uncertainty to whether both the PES and the jobseeker comply to these."*

Moreover, the public employment services of these five countries do not know how many unemployed are sanctioned yearly due to non-compliance with the flexibility demands. Only Denmark has a benchmarking system which provides statistics on the number of unemployed who do not meet the availability requirements. However, they do not distinguish between the various reasons for not meeting the requirements, and were thereby also unable to provide information on the number of unemployed who do not meet the flexibility requirements.

Therefore, up to now, it seems that the flexibility demands can more or less be randomly implemented, so that some unemployed jobseekers may bump into counselors who are very severe in their interpretation, whereas others may come across counselors who see little benefit in the demands and therefore do not strictly enforce them. As already mentioned

in adjustment three, the Flemish public employment service provides more frequent and intensive counseling to those unemployed seen as more needing. This implies indeed that unemployed jobseekers are differently approached by its counselors, but this should not be a free guide to offering a different treatment to persons with same needs. Unequal situations could be given unequal treatments, but it is more equitable if equal situations are treated equally. By not monitoring the imposition of the flexibility demands closely, this sort of aberrations to the system could take place. Any policy on unemployed jobseekers should be unambiguous and clear, so that jobseekers know what to expect and how to behave, and are not subject to randomness. This is why we advocate to monitor more closely the extent to which flexibility demands are actually executed, imposed and sanctioned. In that way, researchers are also better able to map the overall effect of the policy.

Adjustment 5. Focus on competences in recruitment and résumé writing.

The UK's Commission for Employment and Skills conducted a survey in 2010 on almost 14 500 employers' opinions regarding the UK's employment and skill system (Shury, Vivian, Davies & Gore, 2011). Among other things, the survey also explores the qualities employers look for in new recruits. It is shown that employers find previous experience in a similar job one of the most important qualities. Almost 3 out of 4 (74%) employers find this attribute critical or significant. Hence, employers favor recruits applying for jobs in similar positions than their previous one (Nemaninck & Clark, 2002). One of the interesting findings of this dissertation is that unemployed who are willing to reorient themselves (i.e., search flexibly regarding their job content) do not receive more job offers, despite the fact that they search more intensely and are more often invited to a selection interview. This may indicate that employers prefer applicants making a linear career choice, which is in line with the findings of the UK's Commission survey. In the conclusions of chapter four, we stated that it is rather remarkable that individuals actively looking for jobs in other job domains and thus

willing to reorient, are less often granted the opportunity to do so, especially in a context where a lot of employers complain of having difficulties to fill certain job vacancies (European Commission, 2012). Cappelli (2012) demonstrates that even when vacancies are difficult to fill, employers still make unrealistic and excessive demands as to working experience, previous job titles,… towards potential employees. In this view, putting the responsibility for the bottleneck problem merely on the mismatch between the skills education provides and the skills required by employers may be too simplistic. Indeed, recruiters' stringent selection techniques may also be part of the problem. It may make employers not recruiting people who have the necessary competences for the jobs, since they focus too much on previous working titles.

A solution could be to go to a recruitment model where one's *competences* are central rather than the specific previous profession one performed. In particular in our contemporary society where jobs and job contents are changing quickly, adhering too strongly on previous job titles seems inappropriate. Matching demand and supply of labor on the basis of one's previous profession gives a black and white image, where useful competences outside this strict interpretation are not considered relevant. Nonetheless, a jobseeker from a certain profession could have a lot of competences which could also be applied to and be relevant for other professions (cf. Leroy, 2011). In Belgium, the Belgian Sports Federation already successfully applied a recruitment system based on competences rather than previous working titles. In 2007, they made a call to find bobsledders who could participate in the Olympic Games (and make a decent performance). Bobsledding was a bottleneck vacancy, since the Belgians were out of touch with this sport for more than fifty years and there were no athletes with résumés in which they could prove their past experience in this particular sport branch. Hence, the Belgian Sports Federation took on a rather unconventional recruitment approach, by calling for athletes from different sport branches. The idea behind was that some of the

talents of these athletes could be transferred with a limited amount of investment and effort. As long as they had some general sport competence which could be further developed, their past job title of sprinter, long-distance runner, soccer player, basketball player,… did not matter at all. This strategy has proven successful, since the selected sportswomen qualified for the Olympic winter games of Vancouver in 2010 and realised a fourteenth place.

The Flemish public employment service (VDAB) introduced a "competence-approach" in its matching process in 2012 (called 'competent'). In collaboration with sectoral partners, and based on the ISCO- and ESCO-standards, occupational profiles are analysed and it is decided what a person needs to know and to master in order to be able to perform the tasks associated with each particular occupation. At the same time, jobseekers can also use this information to demonstrate to employers which competences they learned in previous jobs. The VDAB then brings jobseekers and employers together based on the match between the competences the jobseeker possesses and the competences required in the open job vacancy. Still, a survey on a representative sample of companies located in Flanders (2250 organisations) indicates that the majority of companies does not yet dispose of competence profiles (only 24% has them) or uses them in the selection and recruitment of new staff (only 21% uses them) (SERV, 2012). Hence, there is serious scope for improvement. Recruitment and selection agencies could be further encouraged to use matching models similar to that of the VDAB and more publicity could be given to the existing competence profiles of occupations, so that recruiters and employers more easily find their way to this toolbox. At the same time, jobseekers (whether unemployed or not) could be learned to develop their résumé in a way that stresses their gained competences instead of their previous working experience in a certain profession. A tool that could prove helpful in this process is working with *competence* certificates (rather than experience certificates), validated by previous employers or public employment services.

Five directions for future research

To end this epilogue, we present five directions for future research. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list, but these directions offer already some food for thought. The fact that we can (easily) come up with a list of five directions also implies that there are limitations at the research performed in this dissertation. We unraveled part of the black box regarding flexible job search, but much more can be learned. Future research is definitely needed.

Direction 1. How does the job selection process of flexible unemployed proceed?

A first direction for future research is studying how the job selection process of flexible unemployed individuals proceeds. Soelberg (1967) indicated that the job choice process can be simultaneous or sequential. If people are able to choose simultaneously (i.e. from different job offers at the same time), than it is likely that they can make a better and more-informed job choice and will be more satisfied with their decision (Barber, 1998). However, if people choose sequentially, they consider one job offer at the time, and have less job offers from which they can choose their future job, which may make them less satisfied once they work in that particular job. In chapter two, we found that flexible unemployed have to choose from a more select pool of job offers. Our results also indicated that flexible unemployed experience more employer-related constraints. However, we only found a partial mediation effect of reemployment constraints in the relationship between psychological mobility and the number of job offers, indicating that other factors also explain this relationship. As such, it could be a possibility that flexible individuals accept a job offer more quickly, which could help explain the fewer job offers they receive on average. The fact that flexible jobseekers receive less job offers and may accept a job offer faster, could imply that they more often use a sequential job choice process. Choosing sequentially for a job may incite these persons then to go more quickly for a substandard job with all its consequences. This assumption could help explain the results of chapter four. Nevertheless, from this dissertation, we have no information on

how the job choice process of flexible unemployed proceeds. It would therefore be interesting for future research to investigate how the job selection process of flexible individuals works.

Direction 2. How do employers recruit?

The above proposition to move to a competence-based recruitment model (adjustment five) makes sense in as far as employers self-sustain part of the bottleneck-problem, as is indicated by some of the results of this dissertation. However, what our results also expose is that we only have limited insight into the whole recruitment process and that much can be gained from further exploring this research field. At present, little is known about the characteristics recruiters like in applicants, other than, for instance, physical appearances or certain demographic variables, like age, gender and ethnicity (e.g., Dipboye, Arvey & Terpstra, 1977; Marlowe, Schneider & Nelson, 1996). It could therefore be useful to have more research that explores in debt the recruitment behavior of employers. In particular, it could be examined how employers evaluate the flexible job search behavior of applicants, distinguishing between the different types of flexibility. This could, for instance, be done by use of an experimental design, where recruiters are confronted with several hypothetical scenarios on which they can indicate how they feel about the situation and would react to it. Consideration could also be given to potential factors that could have a further impact on the selection process of flexible individuals. For instance, is flexibility within applicants more acceptable if they are women, young, Belgian (versus other nationalities), only with a few candidates, in the possession of a certain educational degree, living in areas with high unemployment rates,… ?

Direction 3. How do different variables (e.g., job search strategy, gender) impact the relationship between flexibility and job search success?

As there has been little empirical research on the impact of flexibility among unemployed jobseekers, we, at first, tried to give a broad overview of its consequences for job

search success indicators. However, it is possible that some moderating variables play a role in the established relationships, which is something we did not elaborate much on in this dissertation. One of these moderating variables could be the job search strategy that the unemployed uses. In more recent years, job search strategy has received increasing attention by scholars as a type of job search behavior (Crossly & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al. 2010). It is proposed that unemployed individuals can have three different strategies to perform their job search. Firstly, jobseekers that search *haphazardly*, do not have a concrete plan when looking for a job and gather information of jobs both in line with and not in line with their previous job experience and educational background. Secondly, jobseekers that search *explorative* have several job options in mind and try to gather as much information as possible of these different options from various sources. As opposed to individuals who search haphazardly, they do have some kind of job plan in mind and do not use a hit-or-miss approach. Thirdly, jobseekers that use a *focused* search strategy have a limited number of job options in mind and guide their search efforts towards screening a limited number of vacancies and employers. It is possible that flexible jobseekers who use a focused job search strategy, are more able to convince employers they are a good fit to the company, as they perform their job search in a clear, consistent and thoughtful manner. As such, they could be better in fine-tuning their application to the specific needs of employers, even when they go for jobs with an extensive commuting distance or that are not in line with their previous working experience or level of responsibilities. Hence, it could be that the search strategy unemployed use influences the found relationships between flexibility and job search success indicators such as the number of job offers or reemployment.

In addition, gender could also play a moderating role in our found relationships. In our contemporary society, the social expectation for men to conform to the traditional stable career path and be the family breadwinner, is still fairly strong (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

This could explain why men tend to see a much narrower range of alternative career paths than women (Forret et al., 2010). As a flexible attitude is more rare for men than for women, employers may interpret this attitude as a much stronger negative signal when adopted by a men than by a women (e.g. Egerton & Parry, 2001; Spivey, 2005; Theunissen et al., 2011). It could therefore be possible that the negative path we established from psychological mobility and flexible job search behavior with respect to job content to the number of job offers will be stronger for men than for women.

Direction 4. How does a flexible job search impact other types of outcomes then those studied?

We studied two types of job search success outcomes in this dissertation: firstly, the number of job offers and reemployment and secondly, underemployment and work-related attitudes and well-being. Even though the combination of both types of outcomes helps in providing a clear picture about the impact of flexibility, other types of outcomes could also be interesting to study. At the individual level, outcomes like career goal process (Weng & Hu, 2009), professional ability development (Weng & Hu, 2009), job insecurity (De Witte, 2000) and work-family conflict (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991) could prove insightful. At the organizational level, it could be worthwhile to investigate the impact of flexibility on one's time to proficiency (i.e. the time needed to become proficient in the new job; Griffin, Neal & Parker, 2007; Pinder & Schroeder, 1987) or stress-related outcomes, among other things. Experiencing negative stress is seen as an important predictor of health problems and more negative work-related attitudes and well-being (e.g., DeLongis, Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Terry, Nielsen & Perchard, 1993), which can also influence organizational performance. Research on job mobility indicates that making transitions (for instance, from unemployment to employment) causes negative stress and uncertainty, which levels may depend on how novel the new job is (i.e. on how different the new job is compared to the previous one(s))

(e.g., Black & Ashforth, 1995; Nicholson, 1984). However, other researchers see changes in work role or job content as something positive, which could be developmental for the individual (e.g., Lyness & Schrader, 2006; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott & Morrow, 1994). The Challenge-Hindrance Framework of LePine, Podsakoff & LePine (2005) could help explaining these different expectations. With this framework it is possible to make a distinction between two types of stressors that can go together with making a transition, i.e. hindrance and challenge stressors. In that way, although making a transition may create stress, the types of stress it induces may differ and therefore also its outcomes. Firstly, a transition could be a hindrance stressor, when it is seen as a potential threat to learning and growth. It could then induce "bad" stress ("distress"), stimulating negative emotions. This could be the case when individuals search for and accept jobs of a lower pay or job level. Secondly, however, a transition could also be a challenge stressor when it is seen as offering opportunities to learn and grow. It can therefore encourage "good" stress ("eustress"), causing positive emotions. This could perhaps be the case when people search for and accept jobs of a different job content. It could be interesting for future research to see whether the different types of job search flexibility induce higher levels of positive or negative stress and to investigate how the transition to work from flexible unemployed persons could be(come) more of a challenge than a hindrance. Lastly, at the level of society, it could be interesting to look at the impact of flexibility among unemployed jobseekers on more macro-economic outcomes. To this end, focusing on outcomes like the unemployment rate, the matching-ratio of vacancies to unemployed, an indicator of the sustainability of jobs, etc. could be insightful.

Direction 5. More longitudinal research is needed!

To end this epilogue, we make a general call for more longitudinal research on the flexibility of unemployed persons. Firstly, more longitudinal research could help our understanding regarding how the unemployment duration influences the found relationships.

Secondly, it could help our insight into the sustainability of the flexible job choices people make.

In chapter three and four, we targeted short-term unemployed persons. Hence, we cannot be sure what the impact of a flexible search would be when we study persons who are unemployed for a longer period. It could therefore be very useful to repeat this research with a mixture of short-term and long-term unemployed individuals and to look in more detail at the impact of the unemployment duration on the outcomes presented in this study. As such, future research could also be better in pinpointing the effect of the different protection periods regarding the flexibility requirements in the 25 OECD countries. In a country like Norway, unemployed have to be flexible from the first moment of their unemployment. In some other countries, like the Netherlands, the flexibility requirements tighten gradually over time. For instance, regarding the Dutch occupational flexibility demands, during the first six months of unemployment, a job offer at the educational level as fulfilled in the previous job(s) is adequate. During the sixth to twelfth month of unemployment, an unemployed has to accept a job offer at a lower educational level (compared with the level as fulfilled before), whereas after more than twelve months a job at any educational level is found adequate. At the moment, with the present research, we are able to suggest to give a breading space to unemployed individuals in the beginning of their unemployment (see also adjustment three, above), but we are unable to evaluate the Dutch system (or similar systems). More longitudinal research would be useful in order to understand better which system would offer the best solution for the unemployed.

Next, from chapter four, we know now that flexibility can lead to jobs of more negative quality *in the short run*. A longer time frame is needed in order to better understand the sustainability of the acquired jobs when people search in a flexible way. Hall's learning cycles (2002) emphasize that individuals will experience periods of transition that, inevitably,

lead to initially lower performance. However, Hall also assumed that individuals will quickly improve, benefit from previous job experience, and eventually end up at a higher level of subjective success than before. Based on this reasoning, it could be that the initial transition phase (which we observed) is temporary and that the work situation will ameliorate with time. However, it could also be that our observed negative effects become even more prominent with time. Underemployment research suggests that people do not leave their substandard jobs easily and that arriving in a substandard job may lock individual in a downward career path (e.g., Büchel & Mertens, 2004). Future longitudinal research could look into this and try to map the circumstances under which an individual does or does not pick up after a transition.

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